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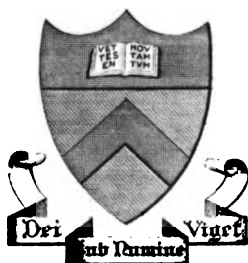
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B E L L A



“ ‘ Please ’ ”

BELLA

BY

EDWARD CHARLES BOOTH

AUTHOR OF

"THE POST GIRL," "THE DOCTOR'S LASS," ETC.



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BELLA

I

THE Poet lay out on the sands with head on elbow, attentive to the sea; the girl's shadow fell over him softly from behind. For awhile he did not raise his eyes, having already said: "No, thank you," to a photographer with stained fingers, and a girl tugging a great basket of pears. He studied, not without amusement, the irresolute shadow cast diagonally across him; noted its sex, divined the favor difficult of formulation, and smiled at the silent combat between timidity and inertness. Once, indeed, he deemed the conflict terminated in defeat, for the shadow shortened, and he was making ready in mind to turn on elbow after its withdrawal to see with what manner of shade his immobility had been doing battle, when he was apostrophized with a trepid "Please!"

Thereat, without delay, he turned, for the soft timidity of the word appealed to his chivalrous parts, and his fibers responded to an unmistakable music in the voice, that had nothing of the metallic deprecation of the professional supplicant. The word was pitched low, as if almost its diffidence had the hope not to be heard; a word rehearsed in trial of courage rather than proof of it. Without response, he knew, the appeal would never be repeated, and his mirth was part remorseful to think it had been indulged on so meek a petitioner.

He was sorrier still when he met the gray eyes that reposed their sober glance upon his own, and saw the loose volume of unribboned hair that fell upon the girl's shoulder like sunlit water poured solidly from a pail. It was cut square in front, a deep flat band that ruled off nearly all her forehead except a thin divisional width to define the level brows beneath. Her face was partly shaded by a big sun hat of brown straw trimmed with a pretty rose kerchief, that had slid backward over her glossy hair, and was held in vertical suspension by a narrow white band passed beneath her chin impressing itself to extinction in the softness of her throat. She wore a pleated serge frock of navy blue; a white flannel tunic with gilt buttons; black stockings and white canvas sand shoes, and in her right hand she held a ball of stitched leather and sawdust attached to her middle finger by half a yard of elastic. The word whose passage had divided her lips had left them still apart, expectant yet visibly in awe of their own temerity; slender lips through which the Poet discerned the gleam of very small and very white and level teeth beyond. As he raised himself on his hand a tremor of humility passed through the lips again, and the girl repeated her prefatory "Please," mingled with a hurried request for his pardon. She had not meant to disturb him. But was he going to stay there long? Was he? Well, then . . . if he really was, might she leave; her shoes and stockings with him until he went away? Might she? Would he mind very much?

"Not a bit. I will take care of them for you with pleasure," he said. It did not even occur to him to be amused at the nature of the question, at the time, for the girl's gray eyes and grave lips seemed to naturalize the appeal and make it very legitimate and sober. He only felt the flattery of being selected for her pur-

pose, and for the rest admired the unaffected manner in which she tended the request. And though on his elbow he still continued to regard her, she seated herself on the sand just where she had addressed him and proceeded without the least delay or subterfuge to draw off her stockings, tugging them over each obstinate round heel in turn; rolling each into its respective shoe and completing their union with a garter. After which she insinuated the shoes and stockings sufficiently near to the Poet's elbow to bear a semblance of owning his protection; gave him her thanks again; smiled a generous smile of solemn good faith, and left him, tracing small irresolute footprints toward the sea.

At the twelfth footprint she hesitated, and came back to the Poet, her eyes and lips filled with the spirit of apology and meekness. She was sorry to trouble him again so soon. But her watch had stopped. Look! She held it out corroboratively on her wrist. And would he have the least objection to telling her the time?

The Poet smiled his reassuring best, and told her: "Not at all." He was sensible that the moment he withdrew his gaze to note the dial, the girl's eyes, despite their meekness, evinced wonderful alacrity in taking stock of him. By the time he met her gaze again he was aware she had surveyed the whole promontory of his person from head to foot, for though her eye was ready to receive his own, it had the quickened and conscious look of a traveler but late returned; a traveler, the Poet aspired to think, not altogether discouraged with the features of this new territory, and by disposition friendly.

And this was not surprising, for the Poet had little affinity with the humorist's portrayal of his species. True, his dark brown hair, though scrupulously brushed,

hinted in the most delicate and indefinable manner at artistic negligence, as if its natural bias were to locks and tendrils, but the tendency obeyed a wise and metrical restraint like the Poet's own verse. And the Poet's face, smooth and beardless and boyish, was subtly distinguishable from the countenance of the mere follower of fashion by a sober thoughtfulness that seemed to have its seat in chief upon the Poet's slightly contracted lashes. For his eye was one of those so-called musical eyes that appear never to focus outward things to their sharpest material definition, but sensed them rather through a spiritual veil of comprehension, as though they had voices for him, too, and he listened and could hear them. Until he smiled the dark lashes made a sort of screen to the brown eyes, so that thought sat dimly ensconced in a tabernacle, and not quite face to face with the outer world. But at a smile—and when he spoke his smile lit up his speech to a fine degree of animation—the brown eyes showed in full: orbs of quick perception and bright response, swimming in an element of gladness quite unlike the pungent quality that sharpens the features of your man of laughter, though laughter was in truth twin-brother to his soul and plucked at all times irresponsibly on the poetic lyre when its strings were idle. And then, there was youth in common between the Poet and the girl, for after all the solemn name of Poet in Brandor's case mantled but a boy in years, and younger still in feeling; his art more, at this time, of promise than achievement; who had wooed the muse melodiously in three or four of the sweetest volumes of Persian yap imaginable—dainty enough to reach the remotest feminine affection—and penned some more than creditable prose in the domain of Belles Lettres; and was blessed with a countenance as sweet as one of his own sonnets; and an inheritance

of riches; and a discriminating taste in apparel. He wore this morning, for instance, a suit of almost snowy flannel, with a double-breasted coat, as faultlessly cut as the tailor's art and the most explicit directions and three tryings-on could make it; and a soft silk collar—all these, remember, at a day far in advance of the odious popularity that subsequently killed them, and made your artist-nature turn with tears to starched linen and hard collars and stiff cuffs for his refuge of distinction from the vulgus profanum and a rose Du Barry zephyr shirt, against which a soft gray tie of woven silk lay to advantage, and displayed most delicately a single pearl. His socks, too, were of silk of the same shade as the tie, and his brogued shoes were masculine enough to counteract any accusation of effeminacy, without being too heavy to blunt the proportions of a small foot. Their wearer was, in sooth, something of an exquisite, but an exquisite of the best type, who seeks to express himself as well in clothes as in his speech, and does not employ raiment—like the vulgarly ambitious—merely to adorn and make conspicuous his person. For the Poet had the gift of wearing fine things easily, and after all, that eternal quality of youth which transforms and transfigures even its own follies, condoned the dandy in him, for nothing he wore was more precious than the tawny freshness of his skin, nor the pearl more decorative than one of his own teeth when his speech or smile unlocked them. Without being actually tall, his slenderness lent the boy height, and there was the spare look of the athlete about his limbs as though they entertained no useless flesh but were thorough working-members of a disciplined and active body, capable of effort and not frightened of fatigue. The hand that had written "Mnemosyne's Daughters" and "A Sheaf of Sonnets"

and the Poet's own name—Rupert Evelyn Brandor—in no end of scented albums, was a manly brown, of a sort to grip a club or yield a racket. The girl's gray eyes followed it observantly to the Poet's watch-pocket, where the sunburned forefinger wrapped itself about his chain and drew forth the gold chronometer that had ticked, twenty odd years before, against his father's ample bosom.

"Half past eleven," the Poet told the girl, "all but two minutes."

And the girl said: "O my! Half past eleven, all but two minutes," in the voice of a certain resignation (or so he thought) as though Time's tardy processes afforded her no great joy. And then, more fervently: "Thank you very much." And with a complimentary dilation of eye as the Poet returned the chronometer to his pocket: "Excuse me . . . but what a lovely watch." He smiled, and held it out once more for the girl's appreciation. "Do you like it?"

She said: "O my! I like it ever so much. I think it's a beautiful watch. It's solid gold, isn't it? Yes, I thought so. May I . . ." and dropping suddenly on her knees beside him she caressed with her soft fingers what her eyes and voice had already so much admired; stroking the case as if the precious metal were flesh and blood, and passing a reverent forefinger over the dial, while the Poet took the opportunity to study the worshipful gray eyes beneath the lowered lids, the small underlip indented with the small teeth to a sort of grave wonder and cautionary discipline, and the delicate softness of the girl's features.

She asked him: "Does it chime the hours? No? Do you wish it did? Perhaps you like it better without. I think I do, too. Mamma has some lovely watches," she confided, when the gold lid had winked like a great eye

under the pressure of her thumb nail and been softly folded down to slumber between the fingers of both her hands. "Not half so big as this, of course," she made haste to add, out of consideration for the Poet's feelings. "This is ever such a beauty. But she has one—Uncle Dody gave it her—all gold and enamel. The figures are teeny diamonds, and it strikes the hours in the sweetest teeniest chime you ever heard. O my! I love it. It is a darling. She let me sleep with it under my pillow once."

Her eyes, brightened momentarily to panegyric and the friendliness of imparted glories, sobered of a sudden, and her lips paused irresolutely on the threshold of further confidence, substituting with a wonderful politeness that added a new lease of interest to the Poet's smile: "But I must not detain you," and assuming the grave and formal shape for taking leave; albeit she did not immediately rise from her knees.

"Why not?" the Poet asked her.

"Because—" The unexpected query plainly disconcerted her. For a while her eyes searched his very solemnly, as if suspecting some ambush in the friendliness of their laughter. "Perhaps you don't wish to be disturbed with company," she suggested after a moment.

"On the contrary," he answered, "I should love it."

"Should you? Are you sure?"

"Absolutely."

"But perhaps you are expecting somebody?"

"Not a soul. I am quite disengaged. Do sit down."

"May I?"

"I wish you would."

"I'd love to."

Her countenance during the brief dialogue had animated once more to friendship; the gray eyes were full of it. She folded her legs beneath the blue serge frock

and subsided into a sitting posture at a respectful but amicable distance from the Poet.

"I'm all by myself," she said by way of apology and explanation, and bit her underlip as if to indicate the heavy state of solitude.

"I'm all by myself, too," the Poet told her comfortingly, and the girl breathed a wondering and commiserative "O my!"

"You may sit a little closer if you like."

"May I?" she asked, with a voice eager for acceptance, and drew herself nearer to his extended length, whereat the Poet's smile converged to a star-point of mirth, twinkling benignantly upon the girl's eyes, that dilated to a certain solemn wonder in return as though his amusement were costing her some trouble to comprehend, like a new long word. The gray of these eyes was very deep and absorbent, and their gaze, once leveled, seemed to grow and mold itself about the object looked at with a soft visual insistence, as if sight, with her, were plastic and must be refashioned to fit the shape of each fresh thing seen.

"Well, then," the Poet said, "it seems that you and I are both shipmates wrecked on the Lonely Islands this morning. So we shall have to be very kind to each other and try to forget all our misfortunes. What do you say?"

The girl said: "O my!" that soft watchword of her nature, that she seemed to breathe for all the varied purposes of emotion, making it by turns express surprise or sorrow, or sadness or commiseration or keen delight. "I say, too," she asserted loyally, and added in a luminous effusion of candor: "It's a good thing I spoke to you, isn't it? And I nearly didn't. I might have spoken to the other"—here her lips wrestled for a suitable designation—"the other gentleman, if he hadn't

turned round and wanted to know what I was staring at. And I wasn't staring. I was only wondering. I was frightened you'd turn round, too, before I'd made up my mind whether to ask you or not.

"I don't know what made me speak to you a bit," she continued, pursuing the psychology of her conduct with solemn perseverance. "I didn't speak to anybody yesterday, and I didn't the day before that. Oh, yes, I beg your pardon," she corrected conscientiously, "I did that day, but it was only because she dropped her glove. And I don't think she was very pleased either when I gave it her, because it was all in holes. Such big ones. But the day before that I didn't. I just walked about and looked at people. But it was no good. Everybody was happy enough without me, and wouldn't look at me, or looked too hard.

"It must be awfully difficult to beg, mustn't it? Beg for money, I mean. Awfully. When people don't want to see you, and don't want to listen to you, and don't want to give you anything. Once I stood and watched some boys and girls playing ball. I liked that; it was lovely. I stood quite close, and laughed when they laughed, and got to know their names, and picked up the ball once when they missed it, but they only said: 'Thank you,' and never asked me to play too. I would, if they'd asked me. And this morning, when I saw you lying here alone—I thought somehow—perhaps—O my, I don't know. I saw you ever such a long way off at first—right over there"—she indicated with the hand that held the leather and sawdust ball—"where the man is cutting the insides out of the prickly fish that smell so dreadful. Doesn't it seem cruel. And I came nearer and looked at you, and wondered whether . . . I made up my mind to speak to you just as soon as ever I'd counted ten. But I changed to twenty. I

couldn't see a bit what you were like from the back, yet somehow—isn't it funny?—as soon as ever you looked round I felt you were just what I'd expected you to be."

"But tell me," said the Poet, readjusting himself on elbow. "You are not all alone, surely? You have some friends here."

"Of course, there's mamma," the girl made haste to assure him. Her eyes grew at the mention very large and mournful, resting awhile on the Poet's face with a look of trouble. "But mamma's ill. She hasn't been out for a whole week. And Leonie must stay with mamma—that's why I'm all by myself. I wanted to stay with mamma, too, but mamma wouldn't let me. She said she would get well ever so much quicker if I went out onto the sands and lent her my eyes, and told her all there was to see. I begged ever so hard, but she said No, no; sick rooms were no places for growing girls. They were for old women. But mamma's not an old woman."

"The Doctor comes to see her every day. Such a funny man he is, with ever such a shiny hat, and a wooden trumpet inside it. That's to listen to people's insides. He says everybody has a different tune. I asked him what my tune was, and he listened and said: 'Girls and boys come out to play.' Do you believe it? He always says 'we' when he means mamma. Like this: 'How do we feel this morning?' 'Have we been taking proper care of ourselves?' 'Oh, we are picking up nicely'—that was this morning. It's something the matter with her heart," she explained, and stopped at that, her eyes fixed on the Poet in a large gaze of scrutiny, as though to glean from his reception of the malady some gauge of its degree.

"Is it very, very dangerous?" she asked, when the Poet had expressed regret.

"One has to take a little care."

"One must not walk too fast?"

"No."

"Or run upstairs—or laugh too much—or get excited?"

"No."

"That's what the Doctor says. When I heard them talking about mamma's heart in such dreadful voices I thought she was going to die, and Leonie thought the same, and I went upstairs and cried. O my! I cried awfully, till I couldn't see the pattern on the wall-paper. I wanted to die, too, and I thought perhaps I could if I cried long enough. But after a time I couldn't cry any longer, and Leonie came up and caught me and told mamma—though she promised she wouldn't. And mamma said I was a silly girl to waste a whole afternoon in crying just because she happened to have a heart that went a little too fast and a little too slow at times, like a clock that wants cleaning. She said lots of people have hearts like that and never know anything about it. I think mine's like that, too. I was listening to it the other night in bed, and once it stopped for a whole minute. That frightened me. Leonie says I made it up, and I'm too young to know anything about hearts. Mamma laughed when I told her and said fiddle-de-dee. She says it isn't half so bad to have a heart as bow-legs or a squint, for it doesn't need a wooden trumpet to find out those."

The Poet said: "I agree with mamma."

"And so do I," the girl concurred. "Mamma says she envies me my frocks, and it's a shame for them ever to be any longer. My next is to come down to here."

She says half the misery in the world is made by clothes, and I think it must be."

She gabbled on with refreshing volubility; her voice, as cool as water, rose and fell with the artless cadence of a fountain. There was not the slightest sense of seeking effect either in word or action; none of the palpable precocity with which spoiled childhood asserts itself, and transgresses the bounds of privilege in conversation. Had he detected the slightest hint of this—and behind his smile the Poet kept keen vigil—his interest would have flagged at once, for he hated spoiled childhood as he did a false quantity. But with this gray-eyed girl it all seemed so easy and so effortless. The words looked to lie so near her lips that he felt rather they had never come from the depths of her understanding, but from its surface, where they dropped lightly in the first instance; falling from her cleanly now, without any added coloring of personal intention. She showed her mother's sayings, indeed, like beads; treasured for themselves, and because of the giver, that she displayed freely, not with the desire to deck herself, but out of a spirit of grateful loyalty and loving pride.

"And mamma says—" the girl went on, then broke off suddenly with her lips half framed, and her eyes stock-still in a gaze of scrutiny. "What sort of hair do you like best?" she asked after a moment.

"Jugged hare," said the Poet.

"Jugged hare? O my! I didn't mean that. I mean the other sort of hair—h-a—" She fixed the Poet with a spasmodic gaze. "I can't spell a bit," she confessed blandly. "But I think it's i, isn't it? This sort of hair," she explained, and pulled a handful over her shoulder.

"That sort of hair? Oh, yes, it's i."

"What sort of hair do you like best, then?" the

girl demanded, restating her question on the basis of solid understanding.

"That sort," said the Poet.

"This sort?" asked the girl, tugging it demonstratively. "Like I've got?"

"Like you've got," answered the Poet, following her loyally beyond the trespass boards of grammar.

The girl took up her old words once more. "Mamma says," she resumed, "that I've got beautiful hair, too. I ought to be proud of that. No, not proud; glad. Leonie says the color is sure to go darker. She says hers was ever so much goldener than mine when she was my age, and much longer, and thicker, and more admired. She wore it in two plaits as thick as my wrist, and they hung right down her back, tied with large bows of blue ribbon, and people used to take hold of them in the street and say: 'O my! What pretty hair, and whose little girl are you?' You like the color, don't you?" she asked the Poet. "And so fine. Almost like silk. See—you may take hold of it if you like," she said, and stooping slightly forward, tendered a golden strand to the Poet on her open palm. "Some day," she went on mournfully, "all that has to be done up on my head. Mamma says it is a shame. Of course, that won't be yet a bit. Not for one—two—three—" She stopped at the third finger to ask the Poet a riddle. "How old do you think I am?"

He guessed "Fifteen," not for a moment that he thought it. The answer gratified her, as he knew it would.

She thanked him with a delighted "O my!" and bade him guess again.

"Fourteen."

"Guess again."

"Thirteen. But no. That's impossible."

She interposed the assurance of a nodding head.

"Yes. That's it. You've guessed at last."

She shot a little preluding glance at the Poet's face; a shy look of calculation with figures in it that made him inwardly luminous with laughter.

"I suppose you're older," she hazarded softly, after a moment.

"Older every day."

"But older than that, I mean. Older than me."

"Older than you? Oh, yes."

She nodded. "I thought so. A lot older, aren't you?"

"I'm afraid a lot older."

"Four years older, perhaps," she pursued, in her voice of cool dispassion; and then, as the Poet's inward laughter rose up and flooded the eyes she had been probing so closely: "I don't want to know how old you are," she added, with chastened apology. "Not a bit, if you don't care to tell me. Only I couldn't help wondering. I've told you how old I am, haven't I? But, of course, that doesn't make any difference." She stopped, discerning the indulgent quality of the Poet's laughter. "You're going to tell me," she cried with a voice of jubilation. "I know you are."

"Oh." The Poet dwelt awhile with his laughter before replying. Never had he met a girl like this. "Twenty-two," he told her. "There. It makes me frightfully sad. Now you know the canker at the core."

"Twenty-two." She tested his age for a moment with her teeth upon her lip.

"It's frightfully old, isn't it?" the Poet asked her. "Think of carrying twenty-two years about with you on a hot day!"

"It's more than I thought," the girl admitted.

"How much is thirteen from twenty-two. Seven, isn't it? No, eight; no, nine! Nine years older than me. Mamma says the older you grow the less you seem to have lived. I'm to understand that when I grow up. And she says a man lives as long as his money, and a woman as long as her looks. That seems funny, too, doesn't it?"

II

THE sun above their heads burned steadfast, suspended like a brazier from the blue stillness of the sky, making distant bricks and mortar tremble insubstantially, and drawing spirals of hot air from the shimmering salt-wet sands until the whole beautiful bay seemed but the reflection of itself seen in blown water. Odors, in the burning immobile air, were woven as into tapestry; weedy iodine; wafts of tobacco; the brine of evaporating sea-water; the saline freshness of herrings; collodion, aromatic and not ungrateful, from the little wooden dark-room on wheels, like a perambulator in petticoats, pertaining to the adjacent photographer. Not a cloud subdued the blue intensity of sky or broke the indigo sea-line. The tepid waves were but magnified ripples, that slid to shore and fretted their thin murmurous way through the marginal seawrack and the faint tide-line of fine coal, and countless bare legs. Life, animate and eager, everywhere responded to the stimulus of sunlight and blue sky. Rainbow colors dissolved kaleidoscopically over the beach; here a sudden sky-rocket flight of children discharged to the water's edge, streaming cries and laughter, and bursting into spray and sea-foam; there some solitary note of color struck vividly afar; the gay awning of an ice-cream van or the red fez of the pseudo-Turkish nougat vendor, hawking his succulent sweetmeat on the familiar tray slung from his neck, to the accompaniment of his melancholy plain-song, and the antiphonic

jingle of an apronful of coppers stirred by hand, or shaken against his thighs in walking.

"Nougat! Nougat! How you like—all fraish—all sweet—von penny! Nougat!"

Mammoth bathing vans, each one branded with the pill-maker's name, moved hugely in and out of the ocean; cumbrous, prehistoric monsters, under doom of extinction, basking in the sunshine by herds on the shore, or drowsing patiently up to their midway, hippopotamus-wise in the water. And all about these, and to either side beyond, boys bare-legged to the hips, busy with destructive spades, and vociferous with projects for reservoirs and harbors; and frantic timorous girls, tucked up into a profusion of petticoats, shrieking their gladness in three inches of water; and dancing rings of sea-maidens in mob caps and spacious bathing gowns, bobbing at the end of ropes, or floundering like stranded flat-fish, or fleeing shoreward from imaginary waves; and ancient and inscrutable sunburned bathing-women, like draped mahogany bedposts, on hire to dip protesting youth, while solicitous parentage stood dry-shod on the shore to conduct the ritual of immersion by signs of walking-stick or parasol. And out beyond these, the strong swimmers flashing their white arms against the azure background of sea, and the bathing boat lazily a-rocking on its inverted image, and the gray stone piers of the harbor—purified in the incandescent sunlight to blinding alabaster—clasped about a bosomful of ships, and reverberating with dim oceanic noises; clank of chain, and clash of scupper, and rattle of derrick, and thrum of engine, and hiss of steam, and clangorous ring of bells from the fish pontoon, where rows of scaly, flabby fish await a buyer; and high above the bleached and buzzing harbor, the scarred white castle, embedded boldly in the blue sky; blind-eyed and dis-

figured, but smiling in the sun like a serene immortal whom all the futile furies of mankind cannot kill. . . . in a word, Spathorpe.

And what a word! Spathorpe at the height of her glory, on a golden forenoon in July! Not the dowager Spathorpe of more modern days—commanding and incomparable though she be—that grows in girth and spreading amplitude of skirt, embroidered with public gardens and stiffened with sea-walls and cement; but that shimmering, younger, lovelier Spathorpe, dear to all of us that knew her then; before municipalities tintured the complexion of their boroughs, and fought fiercely for supremacy on advertisement hoardings; when Spathorpe had her appointed season, and kept her stately court among the watering-places of the world, like the queen she is, and was frequented by rank and fashion, and her houses sheltered great names, and great manners were practised in her public places.

Spathorpe, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen—O my! even twenty years ago.

III

THEY sat not far from the green wet rocks of the Children's Corner, where kirtled childhood multiplied sand pies and castles, and betoweled nursemaids read fiction in the shade, and negro minstrels pitched their midday circle, and children's services were wont to be held by the pious precursors of the Pierrots. Behind their backs the inclined tram glided steeply up and down the cliff, and the buildings of the Parade scintillated in the sunshine, its parapet and terraces tropical with parasols. Mingled with the syncopated cough of the engine that puffed thin wisps of steam through the tiled roof of the tramway station, they heard, as they talked, the frothy music of Herr Toots's band that sparkled merrily every now and then and caused the girl to check her speech with an appreciative "O my! Listen. Isn't that pretty! I love music—don't you?"

Her name, the Poet learned, was Bella Dysart. This she volunteered herself, although some while he had been wondering, and when the information was imparted, looked at him keenly as children do after bestowing a gift, to learn what value the recipient puts upon it.

"Is it a funny name?" she asked.

"A very pretty name, I think," the Poet answered.

"I think so, too," the girl admitted, fortified with his assurance, "although at times I wish it were a little longer. Mamma has two names—Isabel and Veronica. How do you like those?"

The Poet told her: "Excellently."

"So do I. Better than mine?"

"Once," she went on, after he had appeased her doubt, "when I was thanking mamma for having called me such a pretty name, I asked her why she had not given me two, like her, and she told me: 'One's quite plenty for a little girl.' 'But how when I'm grown up?' I asked, and she said: 'Ah! never grow up, Bella. That's just the mistake your mother made.'"

"Mamma is beautiful," she informed the Poet. "Ever so much more beautiful than me. I'm not beautiful. At least, not very. Leonie says I shan't last. Mrs. Herring——"

"Mrs. who?"

"Mrs. Herring." She offered him the name again and waited a moment for his opinion. "It's a funnier name than mine, isn't it?" she said.

The Poet laughed. "Who is Mrs. Herring?"

"Where we live. At least, not exactly where we live, but just round the corner. At least, not just round the corner, but the corner house."

"And where do you live?"

She turned, resting herself on her left hand, and with the right sought to establish locality. "Up there." Her pointing hand rose exploringly over the tiers of deep green trees that shade the terraces of the Parade, to where the crescent of painted houses on the Esplanade gleams white, like Spathorpe's brow. Then of a sudden she burst into radiance as her groping finger succeeded in its quest.

"There. Now I see it. Look! Can't you make it out? See—follow my finger. That's the Sceptre Hotel over there, isn't it? Of course, it is. Very well! Now look slowly along this way—past where the landau is standing. Do you see all those white houses with

green shutters and balconies? Those are towels hanging out of the top windows. And then do you see a large house all built of stone? You do? That's Mrs. Herring's. And if you go up that street you come to a square. Cromwell Lodge is on your left, just as you go into it."

"And you live there?"

"Yes. We came a fortnight ago. Mamma has taken the house furnished. Isn't that lovely!" She gabbled on for awhile about the house, enumerating its rooms upon her fingers. "Dining-room, drawing-room, breakfast-room, billiard-room. At least, there isn't a billiard table; but there are big green leather seats all round, with such beautiful springs. You can play ride-a-cock-horse on them when it rains. Of course, we haven't all the rooms. Two of them are locked. I wonder what's inside. Mamma calls them the Bluebeard rooms. There's nothing to see when you look through the keyhole except some furniture and a lot of books and things wrapped up in dust-sheets. Oh, and I forgot. Mamma has a lovely boudoir upstairs next to her bedroom. Well, it was a bedroom really, only mamma said it would be beautiful as a boudoir—with pink paper. Do you like pink? So do I—I love it. Mrs. Herring says that once upon a time ever such a gentleman and lady took the house for the whole season, and went away without paying a penny. Wasn't that dreadful? Mrs. Herring says she never liked the looks of them from the first. And when the gentleman came back—not the gentleman that went away with the lady, but the gentleman belonging to the house—he found they had taken ever such a lot of valuable things away with them, packed up in some of his own portmanteaux out of the box-room—such a lovely box-room. Why, you may say it's a bedroom really—with

a teeny darling of a fireplace, but it's frightfully close now, because, of course, the window is never opened, and it smells of old leather. Mrs. Herring says you've got to be awfully sharp in Spathorpe during the season. All kinds of queer people come. She says if you're not careful they give you a sovereign, and then when you want to buy something with it they snap it on the counter, or break it in two and tell you it's bad. She had two sixpences like that last year."

The quaint recurrence of the name of Herring caused an almost imperceptible flicker in the Poet's smile.

"You mentioned Mrs. Herring before," he reminded the girl. "I think you were going to tell me something about her."

"O yes." She nodded her head over a repetition of the name. "Do you know how we came to be friends? Of course, you don't. I ought to have told you that first. It happened this way. I'd looked down and seen Mrs. Herring through the basement window lots of times. And one morning—I think it was the third day after we came—I was walking by when I saw a poor black cat all hunched up on the steps, and a dog standing over it. The cat kept mewling in a dreadful voice, and every now and then it shut its eyes as though it couldn't bear to look any longer; and the dog plopped with its front paws and barked. And there was a horrid boy close by, wearing an apron, with a basket over his head and the handle in his mouth, who said: 'Sssss!' O my! That made me ever so angry. I called him a coward and said: 'How would you like somebody to say "Ssss" at you?' and he put his tongue out. Then I picked up the cat and stroked it and went down the area steps and knocked at Mrs. Herring's door. Mrs. Herring came herself, and I said: 'Oh,

please. I've brought your cat. A horrid dog was trying to bite it.' And she held out her arms and I put the cat in, and she said: 'It isn't my cat. It belongs next door.' And just then the dog came down the steps and I stamped my foot at him and clapped my hands to send him away, but Mrs. Herring said: 'Why, it's Bendigo. He's my dog,' and told me they were the best of friends. And would you believe it, the cat began to rub her back under Bendigo's nose, and Mrs. Herring said: 'They're waiting for the fish man. That's who they're waiting for'—the man that cries: 'Fee-raish feesh,' every morning, and makes a song of 'New Boy Lobster' and 'Macker Eel.' Haven't you heard him? O my! He's funny. I love him."

And then, it would seem, the girl had told Mrs. Herring: "Excuse me, but what a lovely big house you've got. I hope it isn't a rude question, but is that the kitchen where I saw your head through the window this morning? It must be a beautiful kitchen." To which Mrs. Herring retorted: "You wouldn't say so if you had to cook in it these hot days!" And then, somehow or other, the golden hair appeared to be established inside, and its proprietress saw Mr. Herring at work upon the knives in the scullery with his coat off, blowing out his lips and saying: "Bsss! Bsss!"; and made acquaintance with some domestic young ladies named Louisa and Helen respectively; and witnessed the preparation of his mid-morning's broth for Sir Henry Philimore, who permanently occupied Mrs. Herring's left-hand sitting-room with the bedroom and dressing-room above. She appeared even to have been permitted to take awed stock of the illustrious knight through the crack in the sitting-room door, what time it remained open between Louisa's entrance and retirement, and confided to the Poet the picture of a very aged and

venerable gentleman with the whitest of long white hair, who even on that hot morning had a plaid fringed shawl at hand over the arm of his chair in case he might need to pass from his sitting-room to the room above, or take a turn as far as the sea-front. For it appeared Sir Henry had exchanged the functions of his liver for a pension (and subsequent knighthood) derived from the Imperial Pools and Reservoir Service in India, and for him the hottest of air in motion constituted a draught. His face was crinkled (the girl imparted) just like a walnut; and his moustache and the little imperial beneath the lower lip were snowy white and looked not to belong to him. He did not lift his face from the perusal of his paper when Louisa entered with the cup of smoking bouillon, and his lips shaped no words of thanks, nor had he shifted his position in the slightest when the door-crack trapped him from view. This vision of aged impassivity manifestly awed the girl, even in remembrance. She wondered what his voice must sound like.

So that was the beginning, she explained, of her friendship with Mrs. Herring. The horrid dog became a darling, and the cat a dear. And thereafter it seemed she always waved to Mrs. Herring when she passed the railings, and called to inquire after Bendigo's health which appeared to be of the best.

"Mrs. Herring's ever so nice. She lets me make toast on the gas oven. It's a beautiful oven, with I don't know how many taps—I think fifty. You pull a handle out at the side and all the burners go upside down. You have to be awfully careful, of course, because it might blow up and kill you if you turn on the wrong taps. Mrs. Herring says so. I'd love to let rooms like Mrs. Herring when I'm grown up. Some day

she's going to let me make toast for the other gentleman and put the pieces in the rack myself."

"The other gentleman?"

"Yes. The gentleman in the big room upstairs. Of course I haven't told you about him, have I? He only came to Mrs. Herring's this morning. At least, he hasn't come at all yet; he doesn't come till lunch, but I saw his luggage in the hall. O my! Such a lot of luggage for only one—almost as much as mamma's. Mrs. Herring said: 'Good gracious! It might be a family!' Great leather trunks as big as bathing vans almost, covered with foreign labels—Paris, and Vienna and Dresden—I read them myself and I know those, because mamma's been there. It took Mr. Herring and another man—poor man, his trousers were torn; you could see his bare leg through; I don't think he had any stockings, and Mrs. Herring doesn't think he had either—it took them ever so long to get the trunks upstairs. They had two towels through the handles and struggled up step by step. Each time they lifted their faces went red, and they made such dreadful noises when they put the trunks down. The man in front walked backward and kept calling all the time: 'Stop a bit. Where are my legs now?' And Mr. Herring said: 'Why didn't you bring an extra pair of arms for this job? Legs are only in the way.' Mr. Herring's so funny. I love him. And Mrs. Herring kept saying: 'Whatever you do, mind the paint,'—but I'm sure they couldn't help that teeny bit by the landing."

This other gentleman, she told the Poet, had never meant to stay with Mrs. Herring at all. The rooms were really taken by some friends of his—a Mr. Pendlip (that was a funny name, too, wasn't it!) and Mrs. Pendlip, and their daughter, and a maid. And the

other gentleman was to stay at the Sceptre for a short time. But when he arrived yesterday—didn't it seem sad!—there was a letter waiting for him at the hotel to say that Miss Pendlip had caught something (she forgot what it was, but it was very funny, and began with a p) and they couldn't come to Spathorpe for a week or more. And so the gentleman was taking their rooms. Whatever was his name? She had been saying it to herself on the sands this morning.

"Mrs. Herring says he's ever so nice—and quite young. I'm to have a peep at him as soon as he's settled. That's a promise. He has dark brown eyes. Do you like brown eyes? I think they're lovely. I wish mine were brown. Mrs. Herring says he is the handsomest gentleman she ever saw." She paused at that, and her gaze rested on the Poet as if suddenly shocked with itself. "But perhaps he's not, after all," she added hurriedly. "That's only what Mrs. Herring says. I might not care for him a bit." A moment later her lips pounced hawk-like on the fugitive name. "I've remembered! It's Brandor," she cried, "and his first name's Rupert. It's just come back to me."

The Poet heard his own name with the polite gravity for that of a stranger—although it gratified him not a little to mark the exultation with which these unfamiliar lips smacked upon it, as if it were some delectable sweetmeat.

"And do you know what he is!" the girl went on, her enthusiasm kindling again. "He is a Poet. Mamma knew his name at once. As soon as ever I told her she said: 'Why, that's the Poet, Bella.' Mamma has read some of his poetry. One was in such lovely heliotrope, with a teeny bookmark. I'd love to see a real Poet. Wouldn't you?"

The Poet smiled. His young pride was pleasantly

titillated. He said to himself: "After all! Here is Fame. She may be small and fickle as folk report her, but the dame is pleasant featured." And his interest in the golden-haired girl and her mother deepened. But his ensuing smile had no trace of a vanity flattered.

"Are poets so different from other people?"

"Poets?" echoed the girl, in an almost shocked intensity of surprise, as if his question had assailed the very foundations of human faith. "O my! Yes. How could they write poetry if they weren't?" And then she looked at him as if her gaze were embarking upon a new survey of his qualities. "Do you know—when I first saw you this morning—of course, it was silly—I wondered, just for awhile, if you were Mr. Brandor. I hoped you would be. But I don't mind a bit now."

He cried: "Good gracious! Is there much of the Poet about me? Don't say that!"

Her eyes tested his features again, probing them quietly for the qualities that had raised the supposition. Then she shook her head—though not emphatically, but with a dubious surrender that bows to overwhelming reason. "I thought—" she hazarded. "Your hair—it's rather wavy, isn't it? Mrs. Herring said it was. And you have brown eyes, too, haven't you? I noticed those at once." Other confidences were plainly in sight to succeed, but all at once they were both conscious of a radical disturbance in the elements of life around them. Streams of color were being drained from the sands in all directions, like dyes running in the wash. The steadfast intentness of life that had marked the embrasured line of the Parade wall was broken. A tide of parasols suffused the terraces and crept in ascending color up the precipitous zigzag pathways to the Esplanade, now subdued to extinction beneath the shel-

tering leafage of the overhanging trees, now blazing out in swift transition where they crossed open tracts of sunlight. Nursemaids rose hurriedly to their feet, closing books and twisting novelettes, and straightening creased skirts, and calling imperatively to distant charges. Everywhere limbs were being hurriedly submitted to the towel; buckets clanked and spades trailed cliffward. The trams passed and repassed in an accelerated service, each ascending car crowded with color. An iridescent pool of humanity thickened about the beach terminus, whose turnstiles clicked in the busy sunlight.

The Poet said: "Hello!" and drew forth afresh the watch whose dial had excited the girl's admiration. "One o'clock! Who would have thought it!"

The girl repeated: "One o'clock," and said—as he expected her to say—"O my! You'll have to excuse me, please. Leonie will be waiting dinner."

He handed over to her the shoes and stockings committed to his care, with a penitent laugh.

"And you've never paddled at all. That's my fault. Do forgive me."

She said: "O my! It has been lovely. Ever so much better than paddling. Thank you such a lot. I won't put the stockings on; I'll just slip into the shoes. Well, then. . . . I've got to go up there. By the tram. Wherever's my penny! Oh, here it is."

The Poet wished her a pleasant journey.

"Which way are you going?" the girl inquired.

The Poet answered: "Just along the sands."

"Have you very far to go?"

"Not so very far."

"Further than me?"

"Perhaps a little further than you."

"I shall see you again, shan't I?"

"I hope so."

"I hope so, too. Lots of times. Thank you ever so much."

She tendered him, after a moment's hesitation, her soft right hand with the ball depending from it, and took reluctant leave, saying innumerable good-byes, and going backward with occasional prudent peeps over her shoulder for what lay beyond. When she had outstepped the radius of speech she prolonged departure with wavings of the hand, that increased in friendship what they lost in proximity. It was characteristic of the girl that, close by the foot of the tramway station, he perceived her in amicable discourse with some ragged but radiantly independent children, cumbered with a very big and crazy perambulator, which they appeared to be pushing indiscriminately in all directions, to the imminent peril of its occupant. Even here she did not lose sight of him, but turned around regularly to maintain the attenuated threads of their acquaintance. He watched the tram that took her; saw it diminish fleetly up the cliff-side and shrink to a standstill at the summit, and the descending tram augment to the point where both were coequal, and loom out large, as if they had exchanged proportions in passing, drawing an elongated cable behind it. At first he could not distinguish the girl in the tiny crowd of reduced mortals emerging from the ascended car, but his second glance showed him a solitary pigmy figure elevated on the third bar of the railings bordering the Esplanade, that waved frantically when he turned his head.

IV

THAT was the beginning of their friendship. It was renewed on the morrow by the Poet's trapping her by accident outside his door, where she had tip-toed in the wake of Louisa for a surreptitious peep at him. He had just completed his toilet after an early morning's bathe, and came upon her so noiselessly and unexpected that he was able to slip both hands over her eyes from behind, and ask her to declare, out of the resultant darkness, who it was.

Her delighted "O my!" full of radiant recognition, left no doubt as to her knowledge of his identity. "It's you! How you did frighten me! I was peeping through the door. I thought at first it must be Him! Whatever should I have done if it had been?"

With that she accompanied him into the room, asking: "May I?" as she did so, and explaining to a flushed and somewhat guilty-faced Louisa: "Isn't it lovely, Louisa! This is the very gentleman I was talking about downstairs. The very one. He caught me peeping through the door just now. You heard him, didn't you? O my! He put both his hands over my eyes. It's splendid!"

Seen at close quarters and by comparison with the familiar objects of a room the girl looked bigger than the Poet's recollection had retained of her from yesterday. His ultimate picture of her had been that of a mere child, whose golden head—at a guess—might have passed easily beneath his outstretched arm; memory hav-

ing been tricked into minimizing the girl's dimensions by the standard of her childish prattle. But truth was she stood within a head of him. Her limbs had the promise of length, not far off fulfillment; her body moved already with that just perceptible slender balance preconscious of height. Her face was less rotund than he had figured; the cheeks sleek and flat instead of salient, as though indicative of a lengthening change to come. But the eyebrows were not less level than he had noted them, and the deep gray eyes beneath were suffused with an extraordinary childish softness. The whole face radiated the candor of youth; its expression as open and unchary as the speech that passed her lips. Her gaze had the disconcerting power of scrutiny that is youth's unmistakable emblem. The adolescent teens show, for the most part, shy and shifting eyes, ready to let fall their look at the first challenge—eyes that take their observations promiscuously and by stealth, as though conscious that knowledge is forbidden fruit, to be picked unseen. But Bella's eyes fastened frankly on to other eyes, as they would have fixed upon a flower whose function is to be regarded. Her sight was of the thirsty suctional sort that lays lips to the object viewed, and drinks its fill, childishly unashamed of the length and copiousness of the draught. Now and again the Poet was amused to detect her studying his necktie, or absorbing the shade of his socks, which were, this morning, heliotrope; or attaching a large gaze of observation to his hair. When thus occupied, her look, as a rule, grew curiously neutral, as if her eyes were too intent upon their exercise to publish any record of what they saw—a characteristic disquieting, no doubt, to those who felt the stock of their personal merits unequal to this visual drain. But the sincerity of her gaze amused and pleased the

Poet. When he saw the gray limpet eyes affix themselves to some feature of him newly noted, his heart smiled, and his own eyes danced until, at times, the girl's gaze was attracted in turn, like a spectator to the sight of some merrymaking, curious to learn the cause. Not that Bella's eyes were invariably undemonstrative in operation. There, again, the sign of youthfulness showed in her. At mere contact with a quality or object cared for, their gray steadfastness could break up instantly into beams of almost adoration. Even at the mention of a flavor to her liking, or a flower beloved, or a property admired, or an action praised, the gray eyes grew bright to a degree almost incredible, suffusing her very flesh with the essence of their gladness. Conversely, when her mood was sad, all the light sang down in them, and they became at once mere pits of sorrow or compassion, soft and dim and shady. The Poet took a deepening pleasure in the sight of this expressive face, watching the flashes of animation come and go. It was a countenance, he thought, inviting contemplation. The patient angler of expression might sit with profit here, beside his rod and line, and study its placid surface for the sight of those delicious undercurrents that stirred it, even though not much of substance came to his hook.

She did not wear this morning the white tunic and blue serge skirt of yesterday, but in its stead a cool lawn frock, girdled with a chamois belt, silver buckled. On her head she carried a pretty adaptation of the rustic sunbonnet, that outlined the oval of her cheek and caused the golden hair to fall more compactly on her shoulders. A double string of coral traced a pink line around her neck, and now and again, by an action perhaps more natural than elegant—though for all that

it seemed to suit her—she insinuated her chin between the necklet and her throat, and took the string of coral in her teeth. But the woman looked out of her eyes the moment they caught sight of the mirror over the mantelpiece, and the girl's hand obeyed the call of her reflection as a soldier might respond to a trumpet call. In two deft instinctive touches to her hair and sun-bonnet, the Poet had a momentary glimpse of the girl's mother, and extemporized for himself a picture of Mrs. Dysart out of the quick reciprocal arching of Bella's brows. It amused him to note how these two faces, actual and reflected, grew naturally grave and consequential at the sight of each other; how the lips compressed, the eyes shone keen and critical, and the heads assumed a poise of watchfulness that showed dignity awake and on her guard. It was but a flash, whilst the girl's finger touched her hat and hair, but how feminine! The latent instinct of vanity aroused—that is as proper to the sex as its becoming blushes—ran the gamut of the girl's body, for she slipped her thumbs into her belt as if to liberate some constricted portion of her stature, and bridled in her shoes for height with a pretty grace. And yet the action was not really vain, and convicted her of no untimely pride. It was but a gesture imitated and acquired; an admired trick of her mother's, probably, picked up like the words from her mother's vocabulary whose outward dimensions the girl might know and worship and yet lack knowledge of what they held.

But first her lips were too brimful of O my's this morning to pay attention to any longer words. Everything was O my!—the room, the sunlight filling it, the breakfast table, the Poet himself. To think it was Him! And, excuse her—but he was differently dressed this

morning, wasn't he? How funny! She was differently dressed, too. Had he noticed? The frock made her look taller, didn't it? O my! Say it did!

. . . But that was his breakfast on the table, wasn't it! She'd had hers long ago. Perhaps she was disturbing him? No? Might she stay a bit? Did he mind? And he must tell her how he liked the toast. She was afraid one corner was just a teeny trifle burned, but Mrs. Herring had scraped that. Look—nobody could tell. Should she lift the cover off the fish for him? It was fish, wasn't it? Yes, she'd seen it fried. Her breakfast had been porridge. Did he like porridge? So did she. She loved it.

. . . As for mamma, in answer to the Poet's polite inquiry, mamma, O my! mamma was ever so much better. Bella had been into her bedroom with the tea, and poured it out for her and put the milk and sugar in, and sat on the side of the bed. Mamma looked lovely in bed. She had the sweetest darlinest color in her cheeks, and her eyes were the most beautiful eyes Bella had ever seen. The Poet would say so, too. Dark gray eyes—ever so much darker than Bella's—with a kind of violet network running all over them (did he understand what she meant?) and such thick long lashes—as long as this, whereat Bella took the fourth finger of her left hand between the thumb and forefinger of her right, and indicated for the Poet a degree of length little short of miraculous when applied to the standard of the human lash. Mamma's eyelashes were nearly black. Bella loved to rub her cheek against them. That felt so funny! Quite like the softest teeny little brushes. And then, mamma's hair looked lovely in two great plaits tied with pink silk, one on each shoulder like a bell rope, right onto the quilt. Bella had unplaited each in turn this morning, to the

very top, and then replaited them all the way down again, herself, and tied the silk bows afresh, and made—as Mrs. Dysart said—“a new mamma of her,” and cried: “O mamma, what a sweet you look!” and flung both arms around her once again, impelled by the call of her mother’s beauty, to further kisses. The Poet ought to see, she rapturously declared, her mother’s sleeping-cap. Such a dear. It was like a teeny darling bonnet of white lace, fitting close to the head, and drawn to the forehead with quarter-inch pink ribbon of the same shade as that in her plait-bows. Bella was going to have one like it when she grew older. And should she tell the Poet what sort of bed-jacket her mother wore this morning? Should she? Well, then . . . and the girl plunged into a loving exposition of soft and quilted silks, with lace insertions, and reversed cuffs to show the lining.

She led the Poet into this verbal replica of her mother’s bedroom, where Mrs. Dysart sipped tea with an elbow embedded in her pillow, holding the fragile cup beneath her lips in the smoothest and whitest of fingers; showed him, too, the table by Mrs. Dysart’s bed, with the bowl of violets that her mother loved, and the reading candle-lamp, in case her mother could not sleep, and the spread of books to hand. Mamma loved books. She had lots of books from what her little daughter valiantly called the “libery.” And others she bought. Mamma was always buying books. Wherever she moved, she left from chair to chair a book behind her, reposed face downward in the cushions. And magazines—O my! Sometimes mamma was almost buried in them. She would sit on the sofa and let them slip one after another to the floor, until they reached her knees, with Bella at her feet intent upon the reversion.

All little verbal thumbnail sketches done at lightning

pace by Bella's facile lips, that showed the Poet irradiating glimpses of this much-mentioned mother. Bella's lips had the instinctive fluency of expression that is of the essence of youth and of the artist. Always they were engaged it seemed, in re-creating things seen, or emotions experienced. What a pencil is for many children, speech was for her. Her industry amazed the Poet, fascinated him. Now and again she would correct a sentence the moment uttered, as another child might re-draw a faulty line, saying: "No, and it wasn't like that. I know what it was like. It was like—" substituting this, or the other. But always her word-pictures had the charm and force of simplicity—never suffered from elaboration. With her the thing seen, when once she surrendered to the pastime, was the thing spoken. Eyes and lips worked in such quick sympathy and concord that at moments, when she turned her gaze upon an object, her spoken comment on it seemed almost to precede the look. And her eyes—for all that a gray iris symbolizes dreams and the gentle state of vision that shows more like a meditation over sight than a direct employment of it—her eyes were sieves for extracting the fine material particles from all they saw. Their vigilance was extraordinary; they passed over nothing, save through politeness. At each step of their progress they picked up a fact or an impression. By them no object was deemed unworthy. They worked with a swift and thorough industry amid the world of natural and familiar objects, like a French chiffonnier amid rags. Or, to choose from more poetic metaphor (if not less truthful) like bees amid the clover or the blossoms of the lime; and perhaps resembling most the bee in this, that her labor turned to sweetness. No malice lurked in her lips; for all their volubility they never venomed

truth—and it is hard to talk much and utter nothing that is unkind. If they registered a failing or a fault it was without a particle of passion. She nurtured no hatred against the forms of authority, like so much of childhood, but seemed to have an innate talent for obedience, obeying through a sort of generosity that would have regarded refusal of compliance as a meanness, and perceiving no grandeur in any wilful breakage of the law.

V

AS the Poet consumed his breakfast the girl's voice kept him company; now from the table end, by the side of him, where at times she came and stood with one hand on his chair-back and the other on the breakfast cloth, watching with politest interest the ply of his knife and fork, and following his movements with such attentiveness that (to the Poet's mirthful fancy) they appeared to be sharing a meal; quick at anticipating his needs: "You want the toast, don't you?" "You've nearly drunk your coffee, haven't you? Shall you want any more? Let me pour it out for you. I love pouring out things."

At such moments the girl's clear voice fell upon his hearing with an effect of coolness, as if she were blowing gently on her porridge. Then, by the sudden silence that followed, he knew she studied the parting in his hair or fed busily on his profile. At another time the sound of her voice, in different degrees of rapture and remoteness, reached him from the balcony. O my! She loved balconies. Didn't he? She wished they had a balcony at Cromwell Lodge. But what a pity it didn't run all the way round, so that you might go out by one window, and come in by the other. That would be lovely.

And all the while that she reveled in its glories her lips reflected for the Poet the things she saw; a ship in the harbor with a dingy red funnel and some discolored figures on its smokestack. Look! There was

a teeny jet of the whitest steam clinging to it—just like shaking a lace handkerchief. Listen! The ship was whistling. Did he hear? Hoo-ooo!—and the girl's voice, in a soft hum, echoed companionably the trailing sound. Or it was a noiseless landau she pictured for him, moving slowly by on the sun-warmed impressionable asphalt. The driver sat all askew on the box with his legs twisted ever so many times around one another. He kept winding and unwinding the whiplash about the stock. Where the horse had just put its foot there rose a great bead of jet. The sea blinded you to look at it! It was all alive with sparkles. O my! The sun felt fearfully hot; the poor balustrade was burning and blistered. There! Now the tram was off again . . . twenty, thirty, forty, fifty. Here came the other, rising over the trees just like a big balloon.

And then, after such expeditions to the balcony, she came back to the table-end again, keen to blend in equable proportions these inner with those outer wonders. To think he was a Poet—a real Poet!—the first she had ever seen. He was a Poet, wasn't he? To which the Poet, the question being put, answered:

"Jenkins says not."

"Who is Jenkins?"

"Jenkins is a beast."

"I think so, too. Why does he say that? Because he doesn't know any better?"

"I think because he doesn't know any worse. If he did, probably he would say it of me."

"Is Jenkins a friend of yours?"

"Well, I never thought of that. Perhaps, now you mention it, he is."

"Mamma says friends always make the worst enemies. She says a friend is your enemy to be, and an enemy your friend that was. And it's easy to forgive

an enemy, and one of the best ways to get on in the world. But it's quite useless to forgive a friend, for if once you forgive them they never forgive you. She says we ought to be grateful to our enemies, for without those the world would be a very lonely place to live in."

"You make me envy you your mamma."

"You would love her. She is a dear." The girl's eyes softened from rapture to solicitude. "Haven't you a mamma of your own?"

The Poet shook his head. Her eyes shed their light and deepened a further degree.

"And no father?" she asked sorrowfully, as though compassion anticipated that his answer would be in the negative.

"No."

"And no sisters?"

"None."

"And no brothers?"

"Not one."

"Only just you?"

"Only just me."

"O my!"

The words came after a pause, mournfully prolonged, and charged with a whole accumulation of wonder and pity. She stooped a little, lowering her brow to take stock of the Poet by the light of this melancholy avowal, and gazed at him for quite awhile with a look both mute and moist.

"Was it a long time ago?" she inquired in a lowered voice for passing the threshold of sorrow.

"Much longer than I can remember," the Poet said. "I was only a child when my mother died."

"And when your father died?"

"I was not much older then."



“‘Let me pour it out for you’”

"How much older?"

"Perhaps four or five years older. I just remember hearing a terrible bell, and peeping out through the blinds at some big black coaches drawn up before the house."

"Those would be mourning coaches—and a minute bell. Did you cry?"

"Perhaps I did. I can't remember that."

"I should think you would. Most people cry at funerals, don't they? And then your own father! Was he a nice father? Of course, he would be. Was that the father you got the beautiful watch from? . . . I thought so. Let me just look at it again, please."

The Poet drew forth once more the gleaming chronicle of time, that had measured out his father's final pulses, and held it for the girl's eyes to mourn over. She took it anew into her fingers, gazing now upon its dial with the reverence for a dead face.

"Do you often think of your father when you look at this?"

"Sometimes."

"And wish he was alive?"

"Very often."

She released the watch with a chastened "Thank you," as if even gratitude must be hushed before this relic of the dead. She viewed its disposal with reverent eyes for an interment.

"And afterward?" she resumed, in the happier voice that mourners permit themselves when the ceremony is over. "Who took care of you then?—for you couldn't take care of yourself. You were only a little boy. How big? Half as big as me? Yes?"

"Then, of course, I had a guardian."

The girl contributed: "Yes, of course," with the

most assured acquiescence, and added hurriedly: "What is a guardian? You'll think me a dreadful dunce. I am. I don't know anything."

From the Poet's definition of a guardian they passed to the guardian's name, and the girl cried: "Mr. Pendlip? Why! that's the gentleman that was to have taken these rooms!" And the Poet said: "The very one."

And in next to no time the girl had elicited all about Mr. Pendlip's side whiskers and his portentous deep voice; and Mrs. Pendlip, and Daisy; and the big Georgian house on the Surrey Downs where the Poet was born, that was let furnished to a Scotch gentleman; and the house in Dulwich (Dulwich? Bella knew Dulwich! Dulwich? O my!) where Mr. Pendlip lived, and where the Poet spent his boyhood.

During their conversation the girl's left hand had slid imperceptibly along the polished back of the Poet's chair, and her face, in her interest, had come very close to his own.

Did he (after a careful perusal of his countenance) did he wish he had a sister? Did he? The Poet answered guardedly that it all depended. Depended on what? On many things. On the sister, for instance.

"What sort of a sister would you like?" she inquired, and as he seemed to hesitate for an answer, prompted him: "One like me?"

That admitted of only one reply. He told her: "One like you," and she breathed: "O my!" in her most grateful voice. "Do you wish I was your sister?"

He wished that very much indeed, and the girl wished it, too.

"You'll call me Bella, won't you?" she begged him in a sudden outburst of sisterly affection, and he said: "Oh, yes. I'll call you Bella, won't I? And

Belladonna for short, and Mercurius Vivus when you are very, very good, and Ipecacuanha when you're naughty."

"And what shall I call you?" the girl asked him, when her appreciation had subsided.

The Poet told her with the utmost cordiality: "Anything you like, Bella," a latitude of permission that appeared to trouble her.

"What would *you* like?"

"I declare I've no choice."

"Must I call you Mr. Brandor?"

"Not if you don't want."

"I *do* want—at least . . ." and then she asked if he would like her to call him Rupert.

The Poet said he should love it.

"And so should I!" she concurred with fervor. "I'll call you Rupert, won't I? Or Roo? How would you like Roo?" Her lips and eyes pounced on the abbreviation together as if they had discovered treasure-trove. "That's better still, isn't it! Roo! That's splendid. I love it!"

And they would go onto the sands, wouldn't they, Roo!—like yesterday; and sit just where they sat before, close to the photographer with the bristles on his chin and yellow fingers and dirty white boots. And this time they would paddle, wouldn't they? What! Both of them? He would? Really?

O my!

VI

BELLA delighted him, fascinated him. She was a little musical human instrument; a perfect scale of the purest, tenderest emotions. Short in compass toward the bass she might be, but the years (he feared to think) would soon repair this lack in her, and add the deeper, deadlier notes of passion and experience. So far not one note was out of tune. Her scale had been regulated by no blundering earthly tuner. Her pitch remained unaltered. No tonal fraction of convention had been cunningly distributed through her little large soul's octave as in the case of its strictly mechanical counterpart, for Bella had but one key, and that of candor.

Such an instrument, in the Poet's fancy, was like a return to the virgin's harpsichord, with its quaintly plucked and passionless, but real and truthful music. For Bella, he felt, was emphatically real, emphatically true, filled to the lips with frankness and sincerity. It may have been, after all, not so much a virtue in her as a quality, since a virtue may be held to lie in the effort, and a quality in the ease with which we do a thing—silence being no virtue in the dumb. And Bella could not help being real, being true; these things were of the fundamental essence of her nature—almost as unalterable as the color of her eyes, or the flow of her golden hair. If her lips had uttered counterfeit coin those gray eyes would have reproached them. She might perhaps have lied for love (love

makes liars of us all) but love alone could be cruel enough to force the barb of a lie across that reluctant little mouth, and the silent suffering of her deceit would have been its own sanctification.

For one thing, Bella had nothing to conceal. Concealment is the first letter of a lie. Her innocence was often guilty of raising blushes on the cheek of experience, for purity of heart alone is proof against embarrassment, and knowledge is the chief complicating factor in life. Between good and bad—that shady midway territory of conduct where most of the human misdemeanors lie—a wide and trackless region reigned in Bella's mind. Wickedness she only knew by hearsay, by repute; like some faraway country on the map, as remote and as unreal as the Greenland of the hymn. The sins she was familiar with and fought were such as civilized society has learned long since to tolerate—selfishness, or meanness, or duplicity, all of them recognized by the highest statesmen and philosophers to be admirable constituents in individual and national character. Her every note was struck with the fearless ignorance of evil; one felt at once how innocent she was by the bold way in which she avoided nothing, for one can sound the depth of people's knowledge as much by the discretion of their silence as the frankness of their speech.

In her laughter, like an octave of bells, one did not hear above the chime the faint supertones of false harmonics, that mingle sometimes with the less unstudied laughter of riper life.

Bella's laughter had a curious deficiency in the quality of mirth; the acrid element was altogether lacking in it. Even when she cried: "O my, how funny!" and her gray eyes kindled and the lips drew apart, one felt that frank good will and not amusement prompted

the demonstration. Mirth, with her, seemed but a meeting ground for the sincerities; a point where eyes could mutually sparkle and share friendship. Sometimes, too, the joke made, her laughter played the hostess, urging others to enjoy to its full the fare while herself feasted mostly on their indulgence, catching pleasure by reflection, and beamingly glad.

Dear Bella Dysart! She was a very clean slate indeed. No one had ever written a bad word on it, or if one had, Time (who is always kind to the young) rubbed it off again before Bella had really read it. She was one of the happiest consequences of the most careful love and systematic neglect. Such love would have spoiled many children, such neglect would have ruined most; but beneath these influences Bella remained unchanged in her starlike steadfastness of self. Deep down in the placid well of her soul it seemed as if a planet were at anchor. At her mother's knee she had received small periodic sacraments of knowledge, and the spirit of much love. Love has a quick intuition, and in time she learned to read. Beyond this her education (if that be not too long a word to describe the absence of it) was scrapped assiduously together from all and the most inauthentic sources—from her mother, from her nurses, from books, from pictures, and from the depths of her own imagination. In any case she had gathered it all like a garland of wild flowers with her own fingers, bringing the nosegays from time to time to her mother's side, for Mrs. Dysart's joy and commendation. The touch of her mother's hand upon the girl's hair, the sound of her mother's indulgent laughter at Bella's faults, her mother's kisses, the sight of her mother's gray and violet eyes as she pressed back the childish face to gaze into those wells of light reflecting her own, had contributed a larger share to

Bella's wisdom than any drawn from the written symbol or the printed page.

For Mrs. Dysart's love, where it touched her child, had been too soft a quality for discipline or training. Those practical ambitions or anxieties that lend the substance of severity to other parents' loves were lacking in hers. Whatever cares or fears she had were held to herself. The moment her eye rested on Bella it softened, and all her gaze grew into a caress. Love for her daughter was like the fleecy eiderdown upon Bella's bed; something to keep the girl safe and warm, to shield her from knowledge rather than to inure her to it—an indulgent coverlet of affection in which all the girl's deficiencies were swathed and hid. True, now and again Bella knew the warm weight of her mother's arm, laid instructively around her neck, and watched her mother's finger trace its passage down some page of print; or heard her mother's lips distilling knowledge with the tenderness of love, or laugh over her with the lenient amusement for a mistake—that is, all told, a tribute to it: "Why, Bella! What a funny girl you are!" scenting the sweet fragrance of her daughter's faults as if they had been blossoms.

And yet Bella was not ignorant. For if the natural sentiments be sound, it is surprising how little learning is needed to complete a character. Other girls in Bella's circumstances with more brains and less love might have grown up blunted and deficient, beings of temper and perversity, repositories of passion and discontent. Bella, because by Providence her disposition had been suited to its fare, was happy, kind, and tractable, by instinct comprehending obedience as a mode of love, and love as an element of life itself, like the breath she drew into her nostrils, or the food she fed on. Into all she did, this quality of affection entered. Every-

thing she learned, or saw, or heard, was transmuted by Bella's nature into the substance of love.

Her eye was quick to see, and her ear to hear, and her tongue to imitate, and her mind to remember. Despite Leonie's occasional denunciations of her French, what time the maid viewed her world biliously saffron, she spoke it very rapidly and sweetly, and with the prettiest unaffected accent. It would have done a Frenchman's heart good to hear the beloved sound of the blocked "g" through her pinched and narrow nose; or the intensity with which she rolled out such a word as "malheur-rreuse."

"Depuis que j'ai vu Sylvandre
Me regarder d'un air tendre,
Mon cœur me dit à chaque instant,
Peut-on vivre sans tourment?"

sang sometimes little Bella to the quaintest of quaint airs of her own invention, swinging in the rocking-chair with a leg tucked under her frock and a hand clasped on her ankle. The words she had picked up from an old cup and saucer, that bore the picture of a florid shepherdess in a quilted frock, with white stockings and red shoes, and a Pompadour hat, and a crook in her hand bedecked with a ribbon.

Bella's French was the gift of her mother. She had known and loved and marveled at it on her mother's lips long before she was able to filter it through her own; slowly, first of all drop by drop to the excitement of her wonder; then faster, with the years, till at last it became a fluid medium of her thoughts like the musical flowing of a tap.

VII

FROM her mother Bella absorbed all the better part of her mother's nature—that resplendent lunar portion of it that shone perpetually upon the child. Her mother had never been angry with Bella; Bella would never be angry with anybody. Her love for Mrs. Dysart was supreme. No breath of fear or of distrust or of those transitory hatreds roused in childhood by the enforcement of parental power ever blew across its flame-like quality to make it waver. Whatever Mrs. Dysart's position may have been toward the world, or her attitude toward her fellow-beings, she had but one face for Bella, one heart; one unalterable mind. Bella could count on her at all times, under all conditions, was never beaten back upon herself, as are so many children at the inquiring age by the perplexing inconsistencies of those that rule them; for all the child's offendings there followed but one punishment, her mother's pardon—an instrument of correction as dangerous as Solomon's rod, and for little Bella infinitely more bitter. For what can the sensitive and conscientious heart do but mourn when those it has injured—however unwittingly—will levy no tax upon the fault? And at least, if Mrs. Dysart's lenience was censurable from some strict standpoints, it never led her daughter from the truth. Those petty falsehoods, those tempting side-paths of subterfuge that children use to slip past the sleeping anger or the harsh parental word, had no existence for Bella. Let her break what she

would, the crime was condoned. At most it made but one more occasion for her to asperge her little bosom with sanctifying tears, to enjoy the blessedness of her mother's pardon, and taste afresh the sweet knowledge of her mother's love.

Love was Bella's religion, as it was her understanding, for what she could not love she could not comprehend. Her creed, condensed, was simply this: Love all, hate none. It is a very neglected child indeed that does not begin life with a prayer, and Bella had never been so neglected as that. In the days when she stood for the first time on the shore of the vast continent of Speech, and vistas of dim stupendous words stretched out before her like a forest of trees, Bella had learned to pray at her mother's knee, and prayer became a solemn garden, sweet and circumscribed, for the child to play in. Often and often she would wander gravely within its precincts, amid the words that had no meaning for her first of all, but touched her love and wonder, tall spires of speech that seemed to spread the softest of blossoms high above her head, and shed their blessed fragrance on the girl's uplifted and inquiring face.

Of the religion as established by law, Bella knew very little—less, indeed, than many grown-up people, and what was explained to her by successive nursemaids and theological domestics puzzled her very much. She knew that God lived a frightfully long way off—far beyond the topmost stars, that were, of course, the souls of little dead children twinkling in Heaven. Sometimes when she went to bed Bella would run to her window and pull aside the curtain and peer eagerly at the firmament of lights for the latest intelligence of doings in the child-world, and cry, with almost exultation:

"Look, Leonie," or "Jeannette," or "Marie," as the case might be, "O my! There's a lovely new star twinkling over there—such a beauty! It wasn't there when I looked last night, I wonder who it is. It must be a big girl this time, by the look of it." And, of course, Bella knew that the thunder was God's voice in anger, though why He should need to be angry, having everything He wished for, Bella could not altogether understand. And she knew that the thunder-cloud was God's mantle, wrapped about His face, and that the fleecy summer clouds were showers, going here and there at God's command to rain upon the earth in dry places; and the rainbow was God's promise to the world, and where its ærial archway sprung from the ground a treasure of gold was hid.

Little of Bella's theological acquirement emanated from her mother. Mrs. Dysart followed now and again her daughter's romantic excursions in divinity with the outwardly assentive, the inwardly amused and wondering smile: "Do you think so, Bella?" "What a funny girl you are!" But never did she essay the serious rôle of teacher, to tax the girl's pronouncements, or insinuate her own doubts. After all, it is possible she reflected; views are views, of chief value to those that hold them, all more or less relative, and by this test or that, more or less false. Why, therefore, seek, particularly in the realm of hypothetics, to depose one set of assumptions in favor of another whose only difference may be peripheral to truth? As for Mrs. Dysart herself, she was Bella's supreme standard of goodness by which the girl measured all things—including the Creator—occasionally, indeed, to the latter's disadvantage. She could never quite comprehend His harshness to Adam and Eve.

"*You* would not have been so cruel?" she cried imploringly to her mother. "*You* would have forgiven them, wouldn't you, mamma?"

"I? O yes, Bella. But then your mamma is only a woman."

"And all about an apple," continued Bella. "Why was God so angry about an apple, mamma? They only took one. Besides, they shared that. Did He want it Himself?"

"Perhaps it was not so much the apple," Mrs. Dysart suggested, stroking the golden hair, "but because of their disobedience. Don't you think so, Bella? God may have been angry with them for that."

"God ought never to be angry with anybody," Bella declared, "and for anything. He ought never to lose His temper; then other people wouldn't lose theirs. God made everybody. Why didn't he make them good? When I broke the Sèvres bowl that Uncle Dody gave you, you were not angry with me. And I was disobedient, too, for you said if I leaned across the table I should break it, and I did lean across and I did break it. You didn't punish me, and you wouldn't even take my box of sixpences. You said: 'No, Bella. You did not break the bowl to grieve me. All your sixpences could not buy another bowl just quite the same as that. But I love you better than any bowl, Bella.' You do love me, don't you?"

"Indeed I do, Bella."

"Yes, I know you do. And I love you. O my! But I should never know that God loved me at all if people didn't tell me so. I should never ever have known there was such a Person. I've never seen Him—have you? How can one love somebody one has never seen? O my! it does seem funny! To think of Him sitting up there all day, listening to hymns. If

I were God I should tell people I loved them myself, so there was no mistake about it. And I wouldn't make people say prayers. If they liked to thank me for what I'd done I should be very glad indeed, and it would make me want to do something more for them. But I wouldn't grow vexed and angry if they didn't.

"Even when we go to Heaven Cook says we've got to sing all the time—not just what we want to sing, but songs made up about Himself, and how grateful we ought to be for being there. Besides, if God knows everything He must know when we are thankful without our telling Him, and oughtn't to wish anybody to say they are if they aren't. I'd rather have people glad than thankful. Gladness is thanks in a way, isn't it? But one can be thankful without being glad."

Bella had lived a long, long time. O my! a frightful long time. Close on thirteen years. Life never seemed to have had any beginning for her. She and her mother had existed always. As far back as ever her memory could penetrate they had been there, the two of them, to where the path of life went vaguely into the dark. Fresh homes and new maids and nurses formed the milestones to her journey, and an occasional cook, raised by some episode or by tribute of the affections into bas-relief upon the tables of remembrance; also, a desultory scattering of uncles, who grew sporadically into Bella's life and faded out again, seldom to reappear. But no friends to speak of, save such as came occasionally with her uncles, and pinched Bella's cheeks; who wore the snowiest of creaseless shirts and collapsible hats that Bella loved to squeeze against her breast, or flick open with the report of a pop-gun against her outstretched hand.

Lady friends formed rarer milestones in the girl's remembrance. Here and there they figured in her

recollection, rustling fashionably in the latest of gowns; ladies who talked toilet, and smelled of eau-de-Cologne and violets when she kissed them, and laughed and spoke in tones that had no love in them, only a bright metallic gaiety, and threw out endearments with the carelessness for discarding a muff—beings for the most part unreal to Bella, because no sentiment seemed to warm them, the objects of her solemn gaze, and not comparable on any basis to her mother, whose arm enfolded Bella with secretly redoubled fervor in their presence, as if the two of them were pledged allies and every gown concealed a hostile power. Ever, behind this come and go of faces, Bella and her mother had shared the consciousness of solitude; it was their secret, the thread on which their lives were inseparably beaded, making them dearer to each other, more real and necessary to each other. No girls of her own age and her own estate had ever played with Bella, helping her to spin the flax of innocence into the yarn of primitive and rudimentary wisdom, or assisted her to shake the tree of knowledge for its immature green apples. She was behind her age, and she was before it. Of the knowledge accumulated and stored by inquiring childhood, Bella, as a mere unit out of communion with the main body of youth, knew nothing. Such wisdom as she had grew naturally in her bosom—snowdrops of the fancy that a whisper might have slain.

VIII

IN the times when Bella was left to herself, or by herself (for one can be very much alone in company)—long evenings when her mother was away from her, afternoons when the rain played on the window-pane, like fingers thrumming tunes, hours when Nurse was wrapped up over-ears in the pages of fiction so deep that nothing but the unfailing instinct for a street accident or a passing funeral could have roused her—at such moments as these Bella used to think.

She would think aloud to herself (if there were nobody present) or aloud to the two of them if she had a companion. It was not an objectionable aloud; it exacted no answers, made no more noise than the contented singing of the kettle. It went on and on, like the spinning of a thread, always musical, often dreamily inaudible—a little solitary voice going out from her, far away over the trackless plains of thought. Bella would spend whole afternoons in rummaging the store-room of her recollection; reclaiming dusty cobwebby memories from obscure and forgotten corners, that she bore subsequently to Mrs. Dysart's knee for identification or confirmation. In this diligent fashion she recalled scenes that less solitary childhood might have forgotten—the dim lineaments of long-vacated homes, always, or nearly always, within reach of the steady roar of London, tiny rooms perched up amid twisted chimney-pots, where the sun blazed hot in summer, or filtered through thick fog in winter, rooms of

more spaciousness and splendor, with lifts to take their occupants up and down, and agile boys in gilded buttons to let them in and out. And once a home at Brighton, and one for a year at Kew, where Bella could see the great Pagoda from her bedroom window, and, of course—though this required no remembering—their present house by Regent's Park, in whose green area Bella went for daily walks, and fed the waterfowl, and heard diurnally the trumpeting of elephants and imperious language of wild and kingly beasts.

Out of the illimitable past, faces came back to her; dead people spoke to her. She was perplexed with the consciousness of lips that smiled upon her, or brows that frowned, or a countenance flushed and angry, or the dim remembrance of voices in conflict, coldly suppressed, but tense and biting, like frosty air.

"A room—" Bella's clear mathematical voice defined to Mrs. Dysart, her eyelids drawn together, lash to lash, as if to get the focus of this distant thing described—"and, I think, a very beautiful room. There were four windows in it, three at the side, and one, a very big one, and two doors. The side windows opened down the middle, and you could walk out of them onto a broad path. Once I think I tumbled and fell down, and somebody picked me up. I forget whether I laughed or cried, but there were little pebbles sticking to my hands and forehead. Beyond the path there was a green lawn, and in the middle of the lawn there stood a big tree that turned all gold, with a white seat going round it. Have I ever seen such a room, mamma?"

"You were a very little girl then, Bella."

"Then there was such a room?"

"It was the drawing-room."

"O my! Whose drawing-room?"

"Our drawing-room—where we used to live."

"You and I?"

"Yes—you and I."

"It was a beautiful room, wasn't it?"

"It was indeed, Bella."

"Why did we ever leave such a beautiful room?"

Her mother's gaze thinned momentarily to a fine point of abstraction.

"You funny girl!" she said, and laughed. "One cannot always live in the same place, Bella."

"Oh," said Bella, pondering the response. And then she saw that Mrs. Dysart had not answered her. "Perhaps you don't want to tell me."

"I don't want to trouble you," her mother corrected quickly. "That is all, Bella. It is a long story. You would not understand."

"Did it make you cry when we had to leave? Did you kiss me when you were crying, and did I tell you your cheeks were all wet?"

"Do you remember that, too?"

Bella nodded her head.

"Yes, I remember that too, now. O my!" pursued Bella. "It's funny how I can remember things in that way. Sometimes I see people doing things in my head. They open their mouths and talk to each other, but I can't catch a single word. Just as if I was looking at them through a telescope, ever so far away. You know what that is, don't you?"

"I know what you mean, Bella."

"Do you remember," Bella questioned more slowly and exactly, as if reading her words from a half obliterated inscription, "a man?"

Mrs. Dysart rang a little laugh like the chime of a bracket-clock.

"A man! What a funny question, Bella!"

"Not Uncle Peter, or Dody," Bella explained. "O my! Before then—a long time before. As many years before as the beautiful drawing-room."

"Yes?"

"Yes."

"And what was the man like, Bella?"

"I seem to know, but somehow I can't say. It's like trying to think of a word that you know as well as well, and can't remember. Was he dark, mamma?"

"I have known dark men."

"Had he a moustache?—a large moustache that seemed to hide something, that made you want to know what was beneath—a large dark moustache that he pulled—like this—and could laugh under without your knowing, so that you had to look ever so hard to tell if he was smiling or angry?"

"Perhaps . . . I think he had," Mrs. Dysart said softly. "What sharp eyes and a long memory you have, Bella!"

"There was such a man then? O my! I knew there was. How funny! I seem to remember everything, don't I?"

"Oh, yes, there was such a man." Mrs. Dysart's lips paused, as though shaped for the word "unfortunately," but no breath sounded it. She brightened her smile on Bella's face instead.

"What did they call him? Do you know?"

"His name was Oliver Dysart."

"Dysart! That's our name, too—yours and mine."

"He was your father, Bella."

"I didn't think I had a father," Bella reflected, "except, of course, Our Father that art in Heaven. I suppose that everybody must have a father somewhere."

Why does he never come to see us?" A pious fear crept into Bella's mind, subduing her lips and hushing her voice. "Is he dead, mamma?"

"Dead to us, Bella."

"O my!" said Bella reverently, and pondered again. "To us? How can that be? Isn't he dead to anybody else?"

"Dead to everybody," Mrs. Dysart corrected.

"Really and truly dead?" Bella inquired, and her mother seemed with her lips to acquiesce, saying:

"Do not think about him, Bella."

Bella caught the tone and looked deep into her mother's eyes.

"Didn't he love us, mamma?"

"We did not love him, either, Bella. You and I did not love him either. He was unkind to us."

"No, no," Bella repeated. "We did not love him, did we? O my! Tell me about him, mamma."

Mrs. Dysart shook her head and laid her fingers upon her daughter's hair in soft repression. "Don't let's talk about him, Bella."

"And I need not try to love him, mamma?"

"You need not try to love him, Bella."

"I love you, and that's sufficient, isn't it?"

"More than sufficient, Bella."

Bella wound her arms around the neck that inclined to them, and fastened her lips against her mother's cheek. She did not see the enlargement of her mother's eyes, magnified by slow-welling tears, but she felt the contraction of her mother's arms around her, that hurt her for one keen moment (though she said no word) before they relaxed over a sigh.

"You do love me, Bella?"

"Yes, yes, I love you."

"More dearly than anybody else in the world?"

"O my! Yes. Who else is there for me to love, mamma?"

Mrs. Dysart tinged her answer with a faintly bitter smile.

"True—who else is there for you to love, Bella?"

"But I do love you better than anybody else in the world. Better than anybody else in the whole world. O my! I love you all the better because there is only you to love. Nobody shares it. It is every bit for you, mamma."

"Suppose, Bella——"

"Yes, yes. Let's suppose—I love supposing. Well?"

"Suppose that some day—somebody——"

"Who?"

"Oh, anybody."

"Suppose that anybody—?"

"Yes—told you dreadful things about me—about your mother, some day——"

"About you?"

"About me, Bella."

"But nobody would ever tell me dreadful things about you, mamma. Never! Never! How could they? O my!"

"But suppose, Bella."

"Dreadful things about you? About you—mamma?"

"About me, Bella. They might. Who can tell? I want you to suppose."

"What sort of dreadful things?"

"Any sort. All sorts. Things that would make you suffer horribly to hear."

"Then I should not believe them," Bella cried in her chill voice of passion—a passion purged of all per-

sonal dress and burning, purely righteous, outraged justice making use of her lips rather than anger roused. "And I would not listen to them. Only wicked people could say such things, and they would never get to Heaven, and I should hate them—hate them—hate them!"

"Ah! You might hate them if it were untrue. . . . But if it were true—if it were really true! Perhaps you would hate your mother then!"

"But it's not true. It couldn't be true!"

"Even dreadful things—and about people we love the best—may be true, Bella."

"How could it be true—about you, mamma! It isn't true. It's not a bit true. Oh, say it's not true!"

"Then you wouldn't love me, Bella?"

"O yes. I would love you. I couldn't help loving you. You can't stop loving anybody you love all at once, like that. Oh, don't let's suppose any more. I hate supposing. It's all right supposing 'As I came over London Bridge,' or, 'Suppose the Moon were made of Cheese.' But you frighten me when you talk about supposing dreadful things, as if you had done something wicked."

"Everybody is wicked, at some time, Bella."

"Oh, yes, I know. We're all of us wicked since the Apple. But that's God's fault, not ours. Nobody knows quite what He wants us to do. He's made up such a lot of things that we must and mustn't, and sometimes it is wicked if we do, and sometimes it's wicked if we don't. Why can't we do just as we like, so long as we don't hurt Him? He's frightfully hard to please. And He says He'll give us anything we want, if only we'll ask Him for it, but He doesn't, because I've asked Him for ever such a lot of things, and never got one. I think He's mean, and I told Nurse so last

night, and she said: 'Take care He doesn't hear you.'"

The conversation, deflected into Bella's theological channel, ran itself away from the momentous hypothesis—the monster Suppose. By Mrs. Dysart the subject was not verbally raised. But more than once, at odd moments when she pressed back Bella's forehead with her hand, in the caressing habitude she had, and gazed down into the girl's reflective eyes, the subject, spiritually resurrected, seemed to haunt her gaze—the phantom of a query, disquieted and apprehensive, that peered, as if it would see into the girl's soul, and read a judgment or a doom.

IX

BELLA was the soundest and lightest of sleepers. She slept as intently as a top, sustained by the least perceptible of breathing; the finest filament of air sufficed to hold the volatile soul in check, reinforced at intervals with a sigh of tranquillity rather than un-repose, when all unconsciously she turned upon her pillow. Less than three minutes after uttering her last Amen, her lids were locked over the gray eyes, and save in hours of sickness reopened rarely until the morrow, when Bella dismissed slumber with the same alacrity that she quitted her chair after a meal, and was as wide awake one moment as she had been sound asleep the last, taking up life like a story-book where she had left it off the night before, brimful of remembered and contemplated joy, suffused each morning with the spirit of new-born wonder, so that each familiar unfolding of a fresh day had for her no less the sanctity of association than the absorbing interest of novelty and change.

Her soul, indeed, was the priceless crystal of content, whose lucid purity lends warmth and wonder and the enchantment of prismatic hues to everything viewed through it. To Bella the sun was more than a celestial orb. He was all that to the girl, of course; a splendid deity clad in robes of changing fire, of gold and bronze and blood-red crimson; a being to be marveled at and worshipped. But he was, beyond and furthermore and better still, her dear familiar friend, her

playmate and companion—too burning hot, perhaps, for Bella in his boisterous summer mood, but beloved above all at eventide, when tired of play and drowsy-headed they watched each other dreamily, these two, in the pious stillness of communion that precedes a parting. Then, perhaps, Bella might sing soft good-nights through her lips to him, and blow him kisses as he left her window-sill, calling him her little brother, and begging him be sure and wake her up next morning, and hoping tenderly it would not rain; endowing this distant incandescent body with such real qualities of friendliness and love that often in her pensive and more lonely moments his last rays gleamed on lashes humid with the girl's tears, for no reason at all that her little heart could give except the permeating sense of a soft and almost pleasurable sadness—the spiritualization of solitude and loss. Bella possessed this faculty of enjoying sorrow for its own sweet sake that is a distinguishing trait of the artistic temperament, and would not infrequently beseat herself upon a buffet to be sad, or in the big settee, or cushions of the soft upholstered chairs, ensconce herself to be as lonely as you please, swinging a dejected heel, and feeding on solitude like funeral cake of melancholy flavor, telling her mother, not without a certain pride in the accomplishment: "O mamma! For ten minutes I've been so sorrowful!"

And then again she had the child's—and artist's—sense of vitalizing things inanimate; endowing even rugs and hassocks with a character distinctive and personal. Dumb animals, for Bella, virtually included chairs and tables, and all the family of furniture that moved on four legs. The moment Bella loved an object it became alive. The love she bore it seemed reflected, so that all the things she cared for assumed in Bella's eyes the aspect of tutelar deities, filled with

watchfulness and love. Here, sublimely unconscious of her power, Bella held one of the greatest secrets in life, the secret of how to live. "They live well who love well," says the old maxim that adds, for those who set a value on the manner of demise, "and die well who live well." For unless we lavish our affections the world we pass through remains but a barren rock, stubborn and reticent, and yielding nothing because endowed with nothing. Life, to blossom and to flower with benefits, must first be spiritually fertilized, made beautiful with our own fancies, and quickened with our own affections. Let the heart cease to be husbandman of our happiness and the world of beauty and of wonder withers; its blossoms fade and fall; its golden crops die down and leave revealed the furrows of a naked soil. All things are only beautiful to those that see them so; the empty heart perceives a hollow world; without love in ourselves no quality of love can touch us. Verily, indeed, to those that have shall be given, and from those that have not shall be taken even that that they have.

For Bella the very rooms were worlds, filled with fellow-lives and wonders; friendly spirits and companionable voices. Even the home-made fairy tale, spun by her own imagination to fill some lonely hour, assumed, when once created, its living place within the circle of the girl's affections—a friend and playmate henceforth to revisit her, and divide and reciprocate love. The days of the week were individual for Bella, each possessing its particular and incommunicable quality—derived again from the girl's own heart—and admitting a preference (though conscientiously curbed, like the mother's feelings toward a large family) in Bella's love of them. Of all days in the week, perhaps, she favored Wednesday. But Mon-

day was a beautiful day, too, wasn't it? And so was Saturday, that brought her stipulated sixpence. And she liked Friday as well. Poor Friday! Perhaps it wasn't so unlucky as people thought. O my! Good Friday couldn't be unlucky—could it—with its beautiful hot-cross buns! And, of course, there was Sunday, whose mention caused her voice to sink in tone to what in attitude would be a kneeling posture, hushed and reverent. O my! They mustn't forget Sunday, must they! Sunday was a lovely day—so quiet and good. But she loved all the days. How funny there were just seven of them and no more, so they had to keep coming over and over and over again. Sometimes she rather wished there had been eight. Did they ever get tired? How did people really know which day was which? O my! And who gave them their names? God?

Whenever Bella took a toy or book or favored thing to bed, its presence near her pillow or beneath it broke her sleep betimes. All through the night the sense of that cherished proximity mingled with the sweetness of her dreams, and in the morning woke her. Or if her lids had closed in slumber, half-smiling over some project for the morrow, it was that project knocking at the door of Bella's consciousness that called the girl all eager from her sleep. Such a project woke her on the Sunday, drew her up irresistibly like a bubble to the surface of slumber, that burst over the golden bars of Spathorpe sunlight through the winking blinds with a rapturous "O my!" The knowledge of the day had been a star twinkling over her since dawn, a kiss coming to her from the skies to meet the moment on her lips. In the brief slumbrous seesaw of Bella's senses, that took place always when first she closed her eyes at night, those effortless imaginings like the play of

sleek waters that subside into the placid level of sleep, there had come to her a resolve—a resolve whose beauty almost woke the girl again—O my! a wonderful resolve, a lovely resolve. It was a resolve built upon a silk hat. Did one ever hear of such a resolve?

To-morrow, Bella told herself, would be a day of bells and best frocks, and new shoes and silk hats. Twice already she had heard the mellow bells of old St. Margaret's ring across the bay on Sunday morning—such gentle, lovable bells with the sweetest and saddest and kindest of voices, that seemed to know all about Bella, and how old she was, and how lonely, and where she came from, calling her by name so frequently and clearly that none but Leonie could mistake it. Bella threw open her heart to these holy sisters of the belfry, and they entered and talked with her, making her as sad as sad, and beautifully devout, begging her some day to come and see them, and yet not reproaching her or showing anger for her present neglect, knowing that her mother was ill, and Leonie a Roman Catholic, who spat contemptuous "*Pftts!*" and "*Heins!*" against the English churches, and telling Bella they were all stolen from the Pope; and Mrs. Herring had the cooking to look after, and there was no one to keep Bella company. But to-morrow she would pay them a visit, with her new red morocco prayer-book, and the Poet should take her, wearing his shining silk hat. In all Bella's life she had never once been to church with a silk hat. O my! never. She had seen them conducted reverently into church along with other enviable little girls, and prayed into, and put carefully under the seat, or out of harm's way on the cushion at the end of it—sometimes so close to Bella that she could peep over the pew ledge and read the maker's name and the owner's gold initials in the won-

derful white silk lining, and smell the fascinating odor of Russia leather from the head-band. Of all her uncles, who invariably wore the blackest and sleekest and silkiest of silk hats—hats that shone like polished saucepans, and looked lovely on a drawing-room chair or on the hat-stand—not one of them had ever taken Bella to church. They had laughed most engagingly at the suggestion, as if, with a little further pressing, they might be prevailed on, and had taken a fold of Bella's sober cheek between their thumb and forefinger, promising: "Oh, some day, Bella." But some day, like tomorrow, never came. Never had Bella known the joy of going to church in company with a decorous silk hat, of being the first to reach it after the benediction, of polishing its surface caressingly with her sleeve as she had learned to do at home. But now this deficiency in her experience was to be corrected. Tomorrow such a hat should go with her to church and share the pew and lend an added fervor to her prayers. "Yes," she decided in the beatific state of faith preceding slumber. "To-morrow morning we will go to church. Won't it be lovely with the bells all ringing. O my! I hope it's fine. And I will lend Roo my red morocco prayer-book if he likes. And after that he is to come and see mamma."

X

AND in the morning the knowledge of the day and the remembrance of her resolution shone upon her heart like sunlight upon a dial; with a sense of warmth and light and gladness that awoke her.

She put on the open-worked stockings—at a day before open-worked stockings had run their fatal course of popularity—and the fawn-colored frock, her very latest frock of all, that was proudly longer in the skirt than any she had worn before, and her new French shoes, with real silver buckles, that Bella's self breathed on and polished to a distracting intensity of reflection; and the filigree silver belt that Mrs. Dysart had renounced in favor of her daughter. Thus arrayed, she followed Leonie, who bore the tea-tray, into her mother's room, with pursed lips and interrogative eyebrows, that on a sudden expansion burst into light and life as she saw her mother's wakened and smileful eyes, flinging herself robustly on the bedside and fastening voluble kisses on her mother's cheek, whose music filled the room like the sudden waking of a songbird, and bidding her mother: "Look, mamma! Aren't they pretty stockings? Aren't they darling shoes? Isn't it a sweet of a frock! Oh, mamma, I love you." Then, when she had taken her mother's two hands in hers, holding her thus lovingly at arms' length to be looked at, and shortened the regard into an irresistible caress, and poured out her mother's tea, and sat at the bed-foot to watch her mother drink it, devouring her

mother's every movement with eyes of curious intentness and admiration, while her lips moved in quick sympathy with what she saw.

"Oh, mamma! You do look sweet, sitting up in bed." "What a pretty smile that was, just then. O my! With your lips close to the tea cup, just like giving a kiss. What were you thinking about? About me? Really?" "And how sweetly you hold your cup, with one—two—three fingers curled. However do you do it? Like this? No, it isn't like that. My fingers won't do it a bit. O my! I'd love it if they would."

Then, after unplaitings and replaitings of her mother's hair, and smoothings of her mother's pillow, Bella had run hatless to Mrs. Herring's, her silver buckles flashing in the sun, to ask how Bendigo was, and Mrs. Herring's self, and "Look, Mrs. Herring. This is the frock I told you of. Am I troubling you? And this is the belt. And these are the shoes. Do say they're nice. And how do you like my stockings? Perhaps Mr. Herring would like to see them, too. Is that Mr. Herring in the scullery?"

It was Mr. Herring tied up in a fringed white apron, busy with Sir Henry's and the Poet's boots. Now and again he held his work out at melancholy arm's length, as though despairing of it, breathed twofold sighs upon the leather, and resumed his rubbing with the air of one trying to efface some blighted past. Bella was not without her doubts as to Mr. Herring's status in the domestic world. He seemed to haunt rather than inhabit it, treading his way about the lower regions with a deportment of curbed respect for somebody dead in the upper; and accompanying each step with a repressive sibilance that sought to extinguish the sound of his feet. No discoverable deference appeared to be paid to him, and certainly none was demanded. His

chief anxiety in life seemed to consist of an attempt to escape notice. Even Louisa exclaimed one day, in Bella's hearing: "Oh, it's only master'm," which Bella, on reflection, came to consider a somewhat curious saying. Indeed, but for Bella's explorative instincts she might never have known Mrs. Herring's husband as anything more substantial than a cough that scraped discreetly behind the scullery door. Always Mr. Herring stole about with an uneasy eye as if a troubled seeker of something difficult to define, whom the mere turn of Mrs. Herring's head sufficed to convince that the object of his quest, if any, lay elsewhere. And when Mrs. Herring, Bella noted curiously, addressed her husband, it was for the most part in monosyllables, such as "Well!" "Now!" "What!" "Here!" all more or less of an interjectional character, like articles thrown, that caused Mr. Herring to quicken his step forward, or vanish as swiftly as revealed, drawing the door upon his face so hurriedly as to suggest a risk of trapping it, making through his blown lips a self-deprecatory noise akin to the sound of a boiling batter pudding when it pouts and puffs with steam. Now that he had shed his upper teeth, and his top lip displayed a tendency to sink behind the lower, it was difficult to believe that he had once been butler in a nobleman's family, and firmly but respectfully insinuated the names of wines and dishes in the ears of great people, and disdained all offices short of dignity. Now, all those little offices that lay below the dignity of wife or maids were his, relegated by a natural process to this one-time formula of pomp and circumstance, Mrs. Herring's designation for her husband being generally "he." "Oh, never mind that, Louisa, You haven't time now. He'll look to it when he comes back."

With her peculiar faculty for loving everybody

Bella bestowed her affection promptly on Mr. Herring, and grew quite intimate and friendly with his double-barreled voice, like a brace of whispers, that made two of every word he said, and carried a peculiar fragrance now and then, puzzlingly familiar, that Bella felt sure she knew and yet could not recall, like brandysnap or caraway seed.

From the scullery and Mr. Herring's whispers, Bella tripped upstairs to Rupert's room, in company with Bendigo, that dingy and most affable dog, a fox terrier by birth and a loafer by proclivity, who was always having to forego his tub during the season, owing to domestic pressure, and grew in sociability as he diminished in cleanliness. It was so long since Bendigo had taken part in the pleasures of the field that he would scarcely have recognized a rabbit had he seen one. Much polishing of Sir Henry's plates had accentuated a tendency in him to embonpoint; the steady enlargement of his abdominal convexity had so widened the rib space between his legs that the latter now obtruded at an angle like the wooden legs of a washerwoman's peggy. His black left ear, snipped and punched like an all-through railway ticket hung with somewhat sinister effect over his left eye, and there was invariably a black patch in the vicinity of Bendigo's reverse, due to his partiality for sitting on hot tar. He lived contentedly under a general sense of disgrace, hearing himself so habitually apostrophized in terms of reprehension and censure that the epithets by sheer familiarity aroused his amicable feelings, and stimulated the most friendly functions of his tail. Representation on Sir Henry's part had caused Bendigo to be excluded rigorously from the knight's apartments, his occasional intrusion there being notified by a violent ringing of the bell. But the Poet imposed no restrictions of the kind. He and

Bendigo, after Bella's introduction, maintained the very best of terms, and many a sigh of sun-warmed satisfaction did Bendigo heave upon the balcony, or beneath the cool shade of the Poet's sofa.

The Poet was not visible this morning, having gone down to the shore with a towel around his neck, but Bella helped Louisa to spread the cloth, and set the Poet's place, and lay his letters on a plate (she knew who that was from—that big one with the big black writing—O my! wasn't it funny writing!) and draw his chair to table, after which Bella raced onto the balcony to look for Roo, and hold an incidental conversation with the boy from next door, who cut a very altered and unfamiliar figure in his Sunday clothes.

This boy, together with a mother, some sisters, a nursemaid, and a brother or two (one of them violently and noisily in arms) was the property of a clergyman occupying the lower sitting-room in the adjacent house upon the Esplanade. Bella had made his acquaintance the day before yesterday, partly through Bendigo, but chiefly impelled to friendship by the curious fact that he lived in the next house to the Poet.

"Do you live there? O my! How funny! Is it a nice house? You haven't got a balcony, have you? Would you like to have a balcony? Are all those your sisters and brothers?" She noticed, without unkindness, and, indeed, with peculiar feelings of affection, that the boy had a very large mouth, not unlike the postal pillar-box around the corner, and no chin to speak of, which slipped out of sight behind his collar when he spoke, as though guilty of something. Rupert called him the Polliwog. Bella did not know what a polliwog was, so the Poet explained that it was classic Greek for tadpole, and Bella did not know what a tadpole was, being O my! frightfully ignorant, but the

Poet said: "Never mind, Bella, you know what *he* is, don't you?" And Bella said: O my! she should think she did! He had a bull-shaped head receding to nothing, and the thinnest of legs issuing from the widest and longest of knickerbockers, cut on a capacious model for growth, that Bella eyed with a look between commiseration and perplexity. Such legs and such knickerbockers could never have led any one to suppose their owner was in love with Bella. That was one of the things he kept furtively to himself, like the solitary apple, or the last humbug at the bottom of the bag, fearful of being called on to divide its sweetness with another. True, he had tried to insinuate a quality of propitiation into the smile with which he favored Bella, but as Bella was unacquainted with the smile in its normal character, there was little to be gleaned from that, and besides, the Polliwog's face at this epoch of development was an indifferent medium for the soft emotions. Wrath, passion, uncharity, malice and the war-like moods lacked nothing by translation into terms of his large mouth and collapsible brow, but a guilty self-conscience laid in wait like a highwayman for all the kindlier feelings, and robbed and pistoled them effectually on the turnpike road.

How such a boy had ever come to attach a sentimental significance to Bella is more than can be explained for the satisfaction of the deeply inquiring. But that she was able to inspire him with one single thought of any tender shade must stand largely writ to the credit of Bella's beauty. Probably the Polliwog had heard his family discussing Bella's charms at table. They had done so more than once, and even assembled discreetly by the window to observe her at the call of the Polliwog's second sister: "Look, mamma! Look, papa! There's that pretty girl with the golden hair,

close to the gate, talking to the postilion and stroking the horse's nose. I wonder who she is." It is scarcely probable that the Polliwog's eye for beauty was sufficiently developed to perceive this quality in Bella for himself. Boys of the Polliwog type have a faculty for coveting the things that other people like. It is a form of greed.

Bella had just counted four ships at sea this morning when the Polliwog appeared. Her alert gray eye caught sight of him at once, and her gaze transferred itself with keen and interested friendliness to his movements, waiting for his look and recognition. He had seen Bella from the first, but not knowing in what manner the difficult problem of acknowledgment was to be effected, decided to ignore her for the present and perform incidentally one or two bold and many acts to recommend himself more valiantly to her favor. To which end he whistled nonchalantly and flung a stone across the roadway, and kicked the palings, and made semblance of performing gymnastic exercises on the gate, and was proceeding to ride upon it when a deep masculine voice from the lower window boomed out like a distant minute gun, uttering a single name, whereat the Polliwog ceased awkwardly, with a lingering promptitude, as if cessation were voluntary, rubbing his hands and putting them into his trousers' pockets, and propping himself against the rails with a heel hooked onto the stone curb, and last of all—when Bella was beginning to wonder however he could fail to notice her for so long—turning his glance casually to the balcony, from which Bella's face, framed on each side in falls of golden hair, looked intently down on him. There, his eyes fenced shiftily with hers for a second or two, and his mouth described the arc of an uneasy smile.

XI

“HELLO!” he said, in a voice pitched loud enough to reach the balcony and yet fall short of vigilant parental ears. He had rejected “Good day” or “Good morning” as forms of correct address betraying weakness in a boy, whistling over his words the moment uttered, to mark their unimportance in his eyes, and looking up and down the roadway with an air of being superior to circumstances.

“Hello,” sang Bella. The word was not one of her most familiar acquaintances, but she befriended it brightly for the Polliwog’s sake, accenting each syllable as if she took the word by both hands and said how glad she was to meet it. The Polliwog winced at the unguarded brightness of her voice, whose clear tone seemed to flash in the sunlight as if it were a coin. He changed uneasy heels against the coping and turned to steal a hurried glance at the lower window, but its pacific and unwatchful character appeared to lend no substance to alarm, for he raised his head to the balcony again, and bade Bella in the same low voice (through a smile like an inverted sickle) not to fall down. This was his humor, or rather the revised quality of it corresponding to his amended smile. The tyrannical humor with which he favored his sisters was of a totally different order, and would have been quite unintelligible to Bella, whose closest intimacy with current slang lay in her own fanciful administration of the parts of speech.

"O my!" she responded, measuring with an awed and imaginative eye the distance of the drop. "No, I mustn't do that, must I?"

She disengaged her glance from its momentary task of computation, and employed it interestedly on the Polliwog's raiment.

"Those are your Sunday clothes, aren't they?" she inquired with ingenuous candor.

The Polliwog's chin went out of sight behind his collar, and his forehead, collapsing, hid his shifty eyes in a self-conscious withdrawal of gaze that Bella read for assent.

"I thought they were," she said. "I've got a Sunday frock on, too. And my best shoes. Look! Are you going to church?"

The Polliwog's brow obscured his eyes still further, and the sickle-shaped smile hung onto his mouth at one corner only. Bella understood him to nod his head, and thereafter he whistled two or three notes, subdued in quality, but of a strain notably defiant.

"So am I," said Bella. "Isn't it funny? I've never been to church in Spathorpe before. Of course, I've been in other places lots of times. Which church are you going to? St. Margaret's? That beautiful big old church right over there, where the bells are. See! Where my finger points."

Bella bent her head as far over the balcony as it would go, to try and gain a peep beneath the obstinate, interceptive bulge of the Polliwog's brow, that hid his eyes from her.

"They're the dearest old bells. They'll begin to ring after awhile. Do you like going to church? I do. I love it."

Some sort of moral convulsion appeared to upheave the Polliwog's brow, and to Bella's amazement he mut-

tered words not clearly audible, but unmistakably in derogation of these hallowed edifices. Bella had almost the belief that he proclaimed himself sick of church, and said that he hated it—though that, of course, could scarcely be, coming from a clergyman's son. For the moment she wondered whether the Polliwog could, by any means, be less nice than she had tried to think him. But she dismissed the doubt by deciding to believe that she was not sure if he had really said what, just at first, she had been horrified to think he had said, and resolved—at least, for the present—to consider him as nice as ever. So her smile, that had softened unconsciously whilst her gray eyes took their curious re-survey of him, brightened again.

"I thought—" she began in her clear and friendly voice, and broke the sentence in favor of a query: "Your father's a clergyman, isn't he? Are you going to be a clergyman, too?" at which the Polliwog twisted an unmistakable backward glance of alarm through the palings, and cast at the balcony an admonitory "Shut up. He'll hear you!" adding, on reassurance: "I'm going to be a sailor."

"A sailor!" cried Bella, her interest, temporarily arrested, streaming frankly out again, drawn by the splendor of the confidence. "O my! A real sailor?"

"Yes—a real sailor. On a man-of-war. I shall wear a sword and a pistol."

"You'll be killing somebody," Bella said, in anticipatory alarm.

"I mean to," the Polliwog retorted. "I'm going out to shoot black men, like Uncle Harry."

"That's horrid," Bella exclaimed, her gray eyes brought suddenly to a standstill. "They've never done you any harm. I hate killing things. It's wicked."

At the sign of her feminine weakness the Polliwog,

true to the filibustering type of his kind, began to trample victoriously upon her sympathies. With boys, love is a matter of mere conquest, not policy. All the elemental instincts of the race rule them; the sex must be subjugated through terror, not affection.

"I've shot birds, I have—with a catapult!" He was parading his gory valor before the startled face that overhung the balcony. At all costs Bella must be made to see and worship the warrior in him.

"I've helped to kill pigs, too—at Christmas. And I shall help again this year—I shall. I've watched them kill all sorts of things——"

"Don't!" cried Bella. "I won't listen." And put her fingers into her ears, until the open immobility of the Polliwog's mouth assured her he was no longer speaking, when she cautiously withdrew them again.

"I call that horrid," she said. "I call it cruel. Don't tell me about such things."

The Polliwog grinned with diabolical triumph. Bella saw something of the real character of his smile. To be accused of cruelty was distinction for the Polliwog, indeed. Blood (except his own) had no terrors for him. Now the girl would see him in his formidable stern proportions; not a mere school-boy, flinching at the cane, but a noble butcher, inflicting pain without compunction, and laughing recklessly over recitals of bloodshed as pirates nonchalantly light their pipes with firebrands over powder magazines.

"Once I saw—" he continued, and Bella's hands went promptly to her head again.

"I'm not listening," she cried, through the buzz that filled her ears, but fixing the Polliwog's lips with a keen and fascinating glance. What had he seen?

Bella was still wondering, watching the Polliwog's lips move, and debating whether she might conscien-

tiously relax the pressure on her ears, when of a sudden the triumph faded from the Polliwog's smile, and the smile slipped furtively round the corner of his face like a fox vacating a foldyard. He seemed to have no further consciousness of Bella, but detached himself from the palings and commenced to saunter down the Esplanade with as much abstraction as if their conversation had been concluded this hour or more.

"O my!" said Bella incredulously, and would have added: "What a funny boy!" when she caught sight of the Polliwog's father, wearing somebody else's cricket cap, and shabby red carpet slippers, who strolled down the asphalt path to the gate with a daughter hanging onto each arm, and the smallest Polliwog but one attempting to fasten himself to the party's rear by means of the younger sister's frock, which she resisted, knocking away the undesired clasp from time to time with emphatic "Don't," "You shan't!" "I won't let you," that Bella plainly heard, and appealing to her father: "Papa! Arthur keeps pulling my frock."

Despite the cricket cap all awry upon his head, and several sizes too small for him, and the carpet slippers seemingly several sizes too large, one would have recognized the Reverend Alfred Higginson anywhere—as he intended one should—for a substantial middle-aged rector of the Established Church. He had the chiseled profile, the clear-cut features, the restrained firm lips, between kindness and severity, that seemed to have portentous "H'm's," and "Ha's" and large "Amens" tucked up in them, the strong clean-shaven chin, the sandy gray side-whiskers, trimmed ecclesiastically close like the rectory hedge. Years of living up to a type had stamped that type on him as his own. There was a priestly ring in his voice and he appeared to take a conscious pride in the public management of it, as the

rider of a fine steed might do, making its tones respond to his control, and causing it to perform occasional caracoles of stately inflection for the display of its admired contours. But the look in his eyes, though lofty, was kind and even genial.

As he came down the garden path, with his two daughters hugging his two arms, and treading on the toes of his carpet slippers, he turned a smile of amused indulgence from one to the other, carrying on a conversation by the mere use of their own phrases in the interrogative, that seemed to magnify his importance by a fine air of condescension, as if kind wisdom stooped a long way to reach the intelligence of children.

"And so Blanche took Emmeline's spade, did she?" "What! You would like to live here, would you?" He was aware of Bella's presence on the balcony, and of the steady concentration of her gaze from the first, for his voice—if not his eye—seemed to include her in the conversation and the radius of good-will. But he did not address any remark to her just then, perhaps for no better reason than the diffidence that sometimes sits on the shoulders of quite mature and most imposing-looking men. Partly he had had the thought to do so, but the appropriate words fell late of the psychological moment, and he relied on the brief extension of a smile that seemed to assume Bella's presence without actually acknowledging it. But the two sisters looked up, staring with undisguised interest at Bella, and then exchanged words and glances behind their father's coat-tails, and looked up again—and if only they had looked up a third time, Bella felt sure they would have smiled.

They passed, all four, through the gate, which caused the sisters to relax hold of their father's arm, running after him with eager little steps in turn, to reclaim possession, and Bella heard them cry: "Roger!"

to the Polliwog, and they crossed over the roadway to the railings overlooking the Parade, and took hold of a rail each, and put their arms through, pointing in every direction, and Bella looked whichever way they pointed: to the castle, to the trams suspended in mid-cliff, to the very ships that Bella had been counting a short time before, to the sea, to the sky. Then they turned to look at the house they had left, and waved their hands to somebody in the lower window—their mother, no doubt. Bella thought first of all they were waving to her, and was only just saved from waving in return. And one of the Polliwog's sisters declaimed something to the lower window that neither Bella nor the invisible occupant could hear; and the invisible occupant replied with something that neither Bella nor the group could hear. However, they laughed, and one of the sisters made a mock trumpet for her ear with her hand, and they all shook their heads good-humoredly and waved their hands again and moved along the Esplanade, pinning the rector against the railings at every step, and pulling his sleeves for attention, or skipping in front of him the better to engage his countenance, and walking backward with both hands on his waistcoat to stay his progress. The Polliwog never once turned his head in Bella's direction.

Bella watched them till they had gone beyond the range of interest. Then she straightened herself to an attitude of relaxed attention, her hands still laid lightly on the balcony, as though she were putting it away from her.

"I wonder," she ruminated, "what it must be like to have a father!"—a reflection that, had he but known of it, should have caused the Reverend Alfred Higginson to be on his best paternal behavior.

XII

AFTER that, since the clock in the Poet's room showed half past eight and there was still no sign of him, Bella must needs leave the balcony and run back to breakfast. She and Leonie sat down in the little red room together. Each said her own grace. Bella put her face into her hands and said: "For what we are about to receive." Leonie lowered her eyes as if some impropriety had shocked them, and screwed her mouth into a button, and made the prim sign of the Cross with a plump finger point over her forehead, breast and shoulders. Then each fell to the business of the board. Bella's breakfast began with a plate of smoking porridge, enriched with cream and sweetened with sugar, or golden syrup. Bella loved the latter, and much experience of its intricacies had taught her to handle the succulent fluid with all the skill of a virtuosa, spinning the spoon dexterously between her fingers to break without disaster the filament of gold that linked her helping to the pot, very often making, for her delectation and Leonie's scorn, most wondrous preliminary lace-work patterns on the porridge by means of the golden trickle from her uplifted spoon—spheres and ellipses and geometrical devices, and sometimes flowers, and even castles, that her kindled and creative eye must watch to the last obliterative dissolution on the steaming plate before her reluctant hand could consent to destroy.

Meals between Bella and Leonie were quite informal. It was permissible to prop elbows on the table,

to sit with both legs tucked under one's frock, to run to the window, spoon in hand, to sigh with discernment of the vanity of all things when the porridge was at an end, to shake one's head in lieu of "No, thank you," if one's mouth were otherwise engaged, to sing at table, to quit the cloth without formality.

It made a quaint appeal to the sympathies, the sight of these two, sitting down seriously to a meal, like characters in some nursery tale. Both had their attitudes, keynotes to one's knowledge and remembrance of them. Leonie, a buxom native of Haute-Saône, stolid on her chair at meal-times, a sturdy and methodical eater, whom the process of mastication inclined—except occasionally—to a ruminant habit rather than discourse. Bella, like some little princess in a picture book, the sole of one shoe showing on the chair beneath her frock; her other foot curled round the chair-spindle, or swing-swing-swinging like the pendulum of a clock to the inward humming of a dirge, her head in the hollow of her hand, poised dreamily on an elbow that slanted out from her, her eyes full to the brim with thought. In such wise the spoon plied between the porridge-plate and Bella's lips until at last the pattern on the plate was plain to see.

Sometimes, Leonie being in a responsive humor, the meal was made memorable with a game, the souvenir of whose sweetness the future years might consecrate to a soft and touching sorrow. Bella possessed every kind of game, in every kind of box, that her mother or one or other of her uncles had bought for her; games that had all in turn been up to bed with Bella and heard, from some adjacent place, the beating of her heart, and felt the warm rapture of her fingers in the morning when she woke to their remembrance; games so varied and so complicated that Bella never

really knew their rules, although she spelled these over with the most laborious and conscientious care. "But no!" she cried. "Don't let's have rules. They spoil things. They're so hard and horrid. Let's make it up as we go on. That's better, Leonie. And you shall begin first, if you like."

So the most elaborate games were evolved out of Bella's fancy; flexible pastimes whose course followed first this channel and then that, as the current of the play suggested, rules cropping up by inspiration to fit circumstances like the necessary rhyme to complete a verse, or being dissolved the moment their enforcement seemed a tyranny. Sometimes Bella would hold up her porridge spoon for signal of attention, and then thrum upon the table with the fingers of the other hand.

"*Qu'est-ce que c'est que ça?*" she would ask Leonie, who, according to the state of her temper, might retort with scorn in the French that was the chief medium of intercourse on these occasions: "But what do you suppose that it is? It is yourself, of course."

"Yes. Of course, it's myself. But what am I doing, Leonie?"

"Doing! *Mon Dieu*, you are giving me a headache. Look you. The table is not a door that one raps so. Be tranquil and reasonable and do not hit me in the face with your wet spoon."

"But it is a tune, Leonie! Don't you hear it? Listen! Tum, tum, ti tum."

"A tune! God forbid. A table has no tunes."

"No, no. It's not a real tune, Leonie, but it goes to a tune. Like this. La, la-la, la, la-lal-lal, la! Don't you see? Now guess what tune it is. *Tiens! Encore une fois—plus lentement*—don't stir your tea just yet, Leonie. Make attention. Tum, tum, tum, tiddle tum, tum, tum."

Sometimes Leonie, not to be propitiated, would cry contempt of Bella's tunes. "Ah! your frightful English melodies. They are all the same. One is just like the other. In France who would listen to such a tune? Be still and let me eat."

At other more indulgent moments, the stolid maid would be cajoled to lend an ear, entering into the spirit of the pastime, and trying to fit the drummed rhythm to some tune or other. Now and again she succeeded, and success so brightened her interest that she was not disinclined to protract this phase of diversion, herself playing the "Marseillaise" and "Malbrouck," putting back her plate to do so, and strange folksongs from her native country that Bella, O my! had never heard before.

There was much of the diplomat about Bella, the *philosophe sans le savoir*. She would not have known it by that name, perhaps, like *le bourgeois gentil-homme*, who had been speaking prose all his life without being aware of the fact. Bella would let Leonie win a game now and then, as prudence dictated, or strum a melody that Leonie had learned to recognize as some propitiatory offering to the fickle divinity that reigned over Leonie's moods, or cause Leonie to repeat her strumming of some tune immediately suspected, to defer the victory of solution and keep the fires of Leonie's enthusiasm bright.

Letters came to Leonie at long intervals from her own country, emaciated missives in the frailest of envelopes, inscribed in thin consumptive copper-plate, with arabesques like the legs of a spider, that evoked strange noises from the recipient as she read: "*Brrr!*" and "*Pfttt!*" and "*T !*" and "*Tiens!*" and "*La, la!*" and "*Hein!*"

Bella loved these letters. As the cat begins to purr

at the smell of its master's meat, Bella's sympathies commenced immediately to kindle at the prospect of being partaker, however humbly, of another's gladness. Her steadfast eyes attached their absorptive gaze to Leonie's as the latter slowly traversed the written lines laid down for them, backward and forward, sheer to the precipitous edge of the page, the eyelids sinking imperceptibly lower at each return till at last their lashes lay upon her cheek. Then wide open again, a sheer leap of the glance upward to the summit of the next page. Bella's face reflected every emotion that Leonie's showed. When Leonie's lips relaxed, Bella's lips relaxed. The birth of amusement, twinkling in Leonie's eyes caused a tiny star to dawn and brighten in Bella's. When Leonie laughed, Bella laughed with such entire sympathy that it was incredible to believe that she knew nothing of the material element of the thing laughed at, and was but a participant in its spiritual and symbolic qualities.

Or perhaps it was not a letter. Perhaps it was a copy of *Le Petit Journal* or some provincial paper that Leonie unfolded, limp as a nightgown, reading it with her arms extended to the full width of it, as if in invocation.

Papers or letters, however, there were real people living and breathing at the other end of them—at some unimaginable spot over the seas. They were a source of much speculation to Bella, of keen interest, of assiduous inquiry. Strangers in a strange land are ever willing to talk of home, bringing closer with words the scenes and faces that they love. In the warm atmosphere of Bella's sympathies, Leonie's lips loosened at times, her confidence unfolded. She showed Bella her beloved country through a fluid pride that made our England puny; spilled her tears in talks of friends and

home. Ten years ago little Marie died of pneumonia; here to-day at table Bella mourns for her. Longer ago than that, Leonie had fallen asleep in church, and wakened all the other sleepers by bumping her head upon the floor. Here to-day Bella laughs and says: "O my!" sees the scene as if it were a picture; wonders this and wonders that. And through a little English girl's interest Leonie sees more clearly, too, things that happened years ago in France.

Leonie reads her letters to herself with the assistance of her lips, and Bella's lips imitate their movement by sympathy. At times such surprising things happen that even were not Bella intimately acquainted with all these people and places already, Leonie would be bound to discharge some of her own astonishment in confidences.

"*Oh! La, la, la, la! Brrr! Pfft! Hein!*" explodes Leonie, with a wonderful rapidity of accent and inflection, like a pyrotechnic display. "So and so, and so and so, and so and so, and such!"

"Never!" cries Bella, making the wonder seem more wondrous still by a first rejection of it.

"*Mais si!* My father tells me that—but hold! Regard. Read for yourself."

"May I?" asks Bella eagerly, her fingers closing in a proprietary clasp of the proffered letter. "O my! Yes. I'd love to. How much shall I read? Every bit of it?"

"*Mais non!* Where the blot is, it is private. My father writes that for me alone. Read from '*tu te rappelle, ma fille—*' *jusqu'à*—down to here, where my thumb is—no lower."

And Bella reads the selected passages diligently aloud, percolating them with suitable expressions of surprise and astonishment; stopping honorably at the

thumb, and assuring its owner: "I haven't read a single other word, Leonie. Quick. Take it back whilst I'm not looking."

At which, perhaps, Leonie's magnanimity is touched. She reclaims the letter, scans again the prohibited portions, wavers, relaxes, says: "But why not? It contains nothing that I am ashamed of. See—take again. You may read this, also, if you wish."

"Does your father," asked Bella at an early stage of these intimacies, "know anything about *me*, Leonie?"

"About you? My father? *Petite morveuse*—what should my father know about you?"

"Oh, I don't know what about me, Leonie. Nothing much. O my! nothing at all, really. Of course, he doesn't. But does he know the least teeny bit about me? My name, and how old I shall be next birthday, and that you let me read his letters, bits of them, sometimes?"

"*Mon Dieu! Je le crois bien!*" said Leonie meaningly. "He knows all about you."

That pleased Bella very much.

"The next time you write to him, Leonie," she said, "give him my love, and tell him I hope he's very well. And I hope your mother is very well, too. Perhaps your father will wish to send some message to me when he writes again."

XIII

THERE is a wonderful Carl, who "spik fav language" in an hotel somewhere in the northern counties. This Napoleon of the Napkin was drawn piecemeal by Bella over Leonie's lips, and to get him landed at all was like playing a trout. Carl occurred for the first time in a letter. When Bella asked who Carl was, Leonie screwed her mouth to demand: "Who should he be? Can there not be people in the world but one must ask questions concerning them? Is there to be no longer any privacy? Carl is Carl. That is who Carl is. It is enough." But then her momentary spleen subsided, and she gave way to laughter, saying: "*La la!*" and "*Mon Dieu!*" and, of course, "*Brrr!*" and "*Pfft!*" and "*Hein!*" so that Bella cried: "You're going to tell me. I know you are. O my!" repeating the name "Carl" triumphantly, to whet her own appetite for news of him, which caused Leonie's temper to veer once more like a weather-vane in the direction of wrath. "Who are you that I should talk to of Carl? Can one have no friends to oneself? Be contented with your dolls. He is my affair, not yours."

But Bella's instant meekness left anger without a wind to stir it. Leonie softened again to a state of confidence, through cunning modulations of wrath, appearing to rebuke Bella for a persuasion which Bella did not exercise, and succumbing at last to imaginary pressure.

"Why should I speak of Carl! *Mon Dieu!* You are as inquisitive as the *douane*. You would know

everything. You have a tongue as long as a nun's rosary. It clacks all day. But do not think I fear to say who Carl is. *Pas d'occasion*. I care not who knows it. Carl—" and she displayed a guarded portion of him, to excite Bella's curiosity.

"Carl!" ruminates Bella. "*C'est donc un allemand?*"

"*Allemand?*" cries Leonie in expostulatory horror. "*A Dieu ne plaise*. German, indeed! Oh, I believe it well—you say it to enrage me. Carl is all there is of the most Swiss."

Whereupon Bella got the further instalment of his "*magnifiques*" black eyes, and his superb moustache that he sweeps upward and to either side, with the back of his forefinger, and his dress coat, and the left-hand shirt cuff on which he jots names and makes calculations with a pencil. And later still the arms and legs and height and breadth and bulk of him—a big, fine fellow weighing nearly thirteen stone.

It is understood between the three of them that some day, when Carl has saved sufficient money, and shall speak eight languages——

"O my!" cries Bella. "Eight? Leonie!"

"He spik fav olreddi," says Leonie proudly, herself drawn into English by the splendor of the achievement. "Von, two, sree, foar, fav." And she ticks the numerals triumphantly against her stubby finger.

"He must be frightfully clever!" says Bella. "Wherever does he put them all to? What languages are they, Leonie?"

"Zey are: En-gleesh. Zen he spik *français*. *Français*—how you say?"

"French."

"Ee-yais—Frainsh. And *allemand*—allemand?"

"German."

"Ee-yais—Chairman. Engleesh, Frainsh, Chairman."

"Three," prompts Bella.

"He spik fav language—En-gleesh, Frainsh, Chairman . . ."

"Russian?" asks Bella.

"Polish?" asks Bella.

"Scotch?" asks Bella.

Leonie cannot for the life of her get beyond these three—except on her fingers, where she ticks the numerals conclusively from thumb to little finger. To the very end Carl "spik fav language: En-gleesh, Frainsh, Chairman" with the final two mislaid. It is quite possible, of course, that Carl speaks bad language, which would make four, or Double Dutch, which would count for two, but Leonie does not suggest as much. Perhaps it has not occurred to her.

It is understood between these three that some day or other Carl and Leonie will preside over an hotel of their own—perhaps in Switzerland—when Carl will know the highest price for everything in eight languages, and be in a position to present bills the length of surgical bandages, and rub his proprietorial palms together in the vestibule and bid all sorts of nationalities welcome and good-by. And Leonie can assist the ladies.

"I spik Frainsh," says Leonie, laying her fleshy forefinger across her left-hand upturned thumb, and looks inquiringly at Bella.

"And English, Leonie," Bella promptly adds, making Leonie a splendid gift of this difficult language.

"En-gleesh," Leonie proceeds, accepting this concession with alacrity. "Do I spik it good?"

"You speak it very good indeed, Leonie. O my! ever so good."

"I spik Frainsh, En-gleesh, and a little Chairman—"

mais très peu—très peu. Ah, mon Dieu! What language this Chairman! Somsing hor-rrrrreeble!"

"Say something in German," cries Bella. "Oh, do, Leonie! I would love it."

"Yaw!" exclaims Leonie, in a deep abdominal voice, with her chin drawn back to her breast-bone. "Ish wise nisht. Das is resht. Man spresht Doitsh."

"That's horrid," decides Bella. "It's just like sneezing. Oh, say it again, Leonie. Louder this time, and more of it."

"Yaw," repeats Leonie. "Ish wise nisht. . . ."

"It is a fearful language," says Bella.

"It is a language for horses," Leonie declares in voluble, vindictive French. "To your friend speak French—to your love, Italian—to the birds, English—to horses, German."

"I will come and see you, Leonie," says Bella, "when you get your hotel. You will ask me, won't you?"

"But not in the season," Leonie warns her, speaking still in French, as the correctness of her English notifies. "Brrr! No, indeed! How busy we shall be. All the beds and tables let."

"I could sleep with you, if you like," suggests Bella.

"O my! That would make less trouble, wouldn't it?"

"*Mais non!*" blurts Leonie on a sudden. "*C'est impossible. Ah! mon Dieu!*" and her face relaxes.

"You wouldn't mind me?" Bella asks surprised.

"Would you, Leonie?"

Leonie's face is scarlet, she is laughing very much

"What are you laughing at, Leonie?"

But Leonie will not divulge. Perhaps there is very little to laugh at after all.

"How will September suit you?" questions Bella.

"Will that be late enough? Say yes!"

Leonie's lips are screwed in consideration. *Ca dépend*. Her mouth becomes normal over a long-drawn "*hein*." Perhaps—but it must be the end of September. Then Bella shall have a room to herself. "*Ah, mon Dieu!*" Leonie is laughing again.

"Will it be a nice room, Leonie? The nicest you've got—with two windows? Oh, please—overlooking the lake!"

Leonie sobers and puckers her lips again. Perhaps there will be some English milords paying her handsomely for the best accommodation she has to offer. It may be impossible to find a bed for Bella after all. But imaginative generosity triumphs over her French prudence. Here, in the realm of fancy, where hotels are to be had for the mere trouble of thinking them; and hospitality costs no more than caution, what is the use of withholding the nicest room from Bella on any hypothesis? *Ma foi*, yes. Bella shall have the very best room in the hotel, with the big chandelier in the middle of the ceiling, that jingles tunes when people walk across the floor above; and the state bed, with tall curtains that slide all around on wooden rings, and swallow the girl with a rattle as if a crocodile had snapped her. Besides, it is really Bella who is the architect and builder of this hotel—Bella who well and truly laid those first firm foundation stones of fancy on which the glorious imaginative edifice is reared, Bella who is hastening on the plans for the nuptials of Leonie and Carl, and presenting them with this palatial Swiss hotel, Bella who has provided the lake, and the high mountains capped with snow, and all the waiters and chambermaids and decorated porters, and guests of rank and riches that are to fill its salons and animate its corridors.

It was not a long breakfast that kept them to the

table this morning, for Bella's ears were perpetually mocked with phantom peals, that caused her to impose silence with an imperious spoon, crying: "Hark! Is that the bells? Listen, Leonie! O my! it can't be yet. Of course not! How silly!"—and Leonie occupied one of her remote and inaccessible moods, sitting aloof in spirit, and armed of speech, as if defending a gloomy watch-tower; repelling Bella's sallies of conversation with the sword. "Be still. Who can eat? *Mon Dieu*, but it is impossible. Since daybreak nothing but chatter. One might as well live with the birds."

XIV

THIS time the Poet was there. Bella could smell the uplifted odor of crisped bacon, and the milder fragrance of coffee that met her on the staircase and called her upward, like a voice of welcome. She swung the upper part of her into the room through a foot-width of open door, holding the knob with one hand and knocking on the outer panels with the knuckles of the other (for Bella even in a hurry was always polite); the keen straight glance of expectancy ran out like a lance to the Poet in his chair; recognitions followed; then a rapt "O my!" of rejoicing; then all of Bella, bringing laughter and added sunlight into the room.

And then—though the pen falters here with a doubt of the proprieties—the sound of Bella's breakfast kiss, bestowed round-mouthed and resonant upon the Poet's cheek. Yet after all, as Bella said: "What harm is there in kisses? O my! Not a bit, really, when you come to think of it." Bella kissed her mother, and she kissed Leonie, and she kissed Mrs. Herring, and she had kissed Uncle Peter, and Uncle Dody, bestowing on each one the same big round noisy token—though tenderer, in her mother's case, and warmer, and deeper pressed, and more protracted, and more plenteous. And what (Bella argued) were kisses, rightly considered, but lips shaking hands? Kisses, O my! were funny things in themselves, when philosophers of Bella's erudition came to investigate them: just the putting your lips together like this, and the pressing them, like that, and the exploding them suddenly apart like bursting a paper

bag. Whoever invented kisses? Was it—and Bella's voice made its tonal genuflection before the altar of a divine topic—God? She thought it must have been. He had invented nearly everything, hadn't he?

But then, shaking hands was every bit as funny, too, when one thought of it, and nobody for a moment doubted any harm in that. The point, debated earnestly between Bella and herself, had been referred—with great solemnity of countenance and penetration of eye—to the Poet in his chair. How was she to greet him in the morning, and how take leave of him at night? With a joyous demeanor in the first case, answered the Lord of Appeal; and a suitable resignation in the second. But what Bella really meant to ask him, was this: Were they to shake hands? In reply to which the Poet said: Most certainly, if she wished it, and her hands were clean. But that, too, was not quite what Bella intended. And she was about to formulate her question in another fashion when her gaze penetrated to the twinkle in the Poet's eye, whereat she cast all further conscientious appeal to the winds, and flung both arms around his neck and said: "You know very well what I mean. I mean *that!*"—placing the significance of her demonstrative pronoun beyond all doubt.

So the matter was settled, and admitted of no further argument, for as Bella herself said: "Whatever was the good of calling each other Roo and Bella just to shake hands?" And after all, to revert to her earlier contention, where was the harm in it? Bella's lips were as cool as a blade of grass at daybreak; as fresh and passionless as the dawn; the very exuberance of her embraces made them proper, for the qualified caress is already half on its way to become deceptive and promiscuous. Bella bestowed kisses as she said her prayers or took her porridge; that is to say, with gusto.

To be ashamed of any one of these might have led her to conceive shame of all three, and so lost the Almighty a very warm and candid little worshiper; for he best loves God who loves his fellow-men, and once the conscientious pruning knife is laid to the branches of affection there is little knowing where its work may end.

To trim the growing tree of youth is an operation calling for the nicest skill and certainty of hand, the true knowledge of what buds to sacrifice, and which preserve, the time to lay the blade, so there be no bleeding of young sap, nor waste of tender tissue. Good gardeners of youth are few and far between, and Mrs. Dysart would have been the last to claim herself one of them. Often, when Bella exclaimed: "O, what a big sigh that was, mamma! Whoever is it for?" the girl little guessed it was for her, or that her mother's answer put truth beneath an allegory as deep as Scripture. When Mrs. Dysart said on one occasion: "Because you are very nearly a year older, Bella, and each year of yours makes nearly two of mine," Bella cried: "O my!" and puzzlingly wondered how that could be, asking ultimately: "Is it another of the things I shall understand when I'm grown up?"

For Mrs. Dysart cannot have been blind to Bella's dangers; to these beautiful green runners that grew wild out of her daughter's disposition like fragrant brier, threatening Bella's heart with their own sharp thorns. Some day—always approaching, but ever in mind held remote—Bella must be shorn like the spring lamb to the bleak winds of the world, all that present fleece of warm sincerities clipped from her, her redundant affections trimmed and hid from sight like her legs and hair, a new Bella, with new eyes, issued fresh and wondering from her old self, that takes life's

hard and beaten track, seeking dumbly from side to side of her after the lost pasture and the early fold.

But that dread day, so apprehended, is not yet. The world is Bella's own, of the substance and tissue of her own fancy, as soft as her dreams. She bends its iron laws like wax; for her they are no more than the disregarded rules of the games she plays. And let it be so, Mrs. Dysart thinks, till knowledge growing up instinctively within her darkens, in its own time, the sunlit doorway of youth.

So this morning, thanks be to Providence, she is herself untrammelled—Bella without ceremony, the daughter of impulse and affection. She runs to the Poet's chair and flings her arms about his neck, and plants two fresh kisses on his cheek, big enough to raise blisters.

"O my! How lovely you smell. Is it the tooth-powder?" Mamma, it seems, has a most beautiful collection of dentifrices; pastes in tubes, and powders in pots, and every species of liquid in bottles. Dento and Enameline and Ivorisco and Snow Mint—Bella loves that; it tastes just like those beautiful creams you buy—and ever so many more that Bella cannot remember by name, though she is familiar with their taste and smell. For, of course, Mamma has the most lovely teeth the Poet ever looked at. O my! He will see them to-day. As white as china to the very back and beyond of all—and every one her own. No—Bella must beg his pardon. There is just one at the far side of all, that is part of it gold. Isn't that funny? Bella loves that one. It was all owing to a piece of stone in a New Year's pudding. The Poet must take notice when mamma laughs; it shines beautifully then, and Bella thinks it makes mamma look prettier, especially when she crinkles her nose.

All this is whilst Bella stands by the Poet's chair with her arm still lightly laid upon his shoulder. She has to withdraw, of course, to display the frock and the gossamer stockings that look, the Poet tells her, less like stockings than as if somebody had been taking writing lessons on her legs; and for the shoe-buckles to be held up to inspection, so that he may see the hall-mark in the silver, and pull a face at his grotesque reflections in the burnished metal. After which, when all the girl's adornment has been sufficiently admired, and a strand of her hair (that was shampooed last night) has been proffered to the Poet's fingers, that he may note its renovated softness, Bella draws once more to his side, scans his profile for a space as if it were the horizon of a new land of promise, and of a sudden puts her lips to his ear and breathes into it a hasty, warm, and quite unexpected petition.

It causes the Poet to let fall his knife and fork, exclaiming: "Good gracious, Bella! How you did startle me." Bella is not deterred by his surprise, but tightens her hold upon him, and whispers in her most persuasive voice: "Do!" and on the heels of that: "You might!" and "Will you?" and then: "Please," and his own name: "Roo," so beseechingly pronounced as to summarize all that can possibly be implied by the word persuasion; and then—for she has had meanwhile the fortitude to draw back her face to look at him—attaches her lips once more to his ear and fills it with a sibilant mixture of warm breath and words, the latter seemingly all compounded of capital S's, that overflow their intended receptacle and tickle the Poet's neck, till he must needs screw it into his collar, and would be quite unintelligible if some subtler sense than hearing did not interpret what Bella's petition is meant to be.

The Poet says reproachfully: "This is so sudden, Bella. You take me quite by surprise. I must think about it," and would fortify himself with coffee, but that Bella lays hold of his hand and imprisons it, crying: "No, don't think about it. And don't go on with your breakfast. Say first of all you will! Do—and afterward you are to come and see mamma."

The soul of the Poet has been aspiring to higher things than church this morning, but the look of supplication in Bella's gray eyes, and the grip of capture in her hand, tell him he is doomed. For there is a quality of sweetness in her importunities that he knows himself unable to resist. Such humility and winsome confidence go to their making, and Bella's demands issue always with the sanction of her beauty (like soldiers blessed by the Pope) that to oppose them hints heresy, or worse. It is as hard, the Poet feels, to deny Bella anything as to break step with a military band, whose very rhythm undermines the will, and takes hold of reason through the pulses of the blood. And Bella knows, or seems to know, her power over him. Not one of all her uncles, despite their obliging and promissory smiles, was quite so much her own as Rupert. Their laughter always reached her from a long way off, like the light whose source is a star—she was familiar with its beams, the substance baffled her. But Rupert's laughter, for all it fell upon her from the tremendous height of two and twenty years, and was tempered by wisdom infinitely above her head, had a quality very like and friendly with her own. Here was a true uncle at last. Or no; not so much an uncle—a cousin; or better still, a big elder brother—how Bella wished he were, her very own!—whom she might love and tease and trouble and be publicly proud of and worship with all the reverence of her heart for a great

dictionary or superb encyclopedia on a shelf, filled with knowledge, and beautifully bound, and very fascinating and noble to the eye. She swung her face in front of his, as if to waylay and subdue the Poet's look, and caught the tail-end of an escaping smile. That made her sure of him. Her gaze of supplication brightened to joy in a moment. She let go his hand as a prisoner unworthy of retention, and captured the Poet's coat lapels instead.

"You're going with me. I know you are. I knew you would. I can tell it by your eye. Oh, thank you. *Thank* you. THANK you."

And then, emboldened by success, she drew his head toward her once again and poured into the Poet's ear that other petition, formulated overnight, and cherished since daybreak—the silk hat.

The silk hat? This time the Poet's surprise though all of laughter and amusement, was quite sincere. Whatever did Bella know about his silk hat?

Oh, Bella knew everything about it. Bella had made acquaintance with his hat-box in the hall, on the very first morning of its arrival, and had watched it pass up the staircase after the big trunk. And Bella knew it was a hat-box, for she had described it to mamma, and mamma recognized it at once, and told her it would probably be lined with crimson silk inside, because gentlemen liked rich colors, and would hold six assorted hats, and two hat-brushes. And besides, Bella knew it was lined with crimson, and there were two hat-brushes, and there were six hats, and one of them was a silk hat, because a friend of hers had seen them one day when the Poet left his hat-box open. Which made the Poet delight Bella with the sudden exclamation: "Bella! Is there anything in the world you don't know about me?"

"O my! I do know a lot, don't I?" Bella acknowledged, her eyes dancing with the exuberance of power. But when she told the Poet all her aspirations touching the hat, and how it was to be the very first silk hat that had ever taken her to church, what could sentiment do but yield? Moreover, the sacrifice was somewhat less, perhaps, than now it sounds. It was not such a social solecism to wear the silk hat on Sunday by the sea in those days. There had even been attempts to introduce the silk hat on the Parade during the formal hours of the morning, and though these failed—like many other valiant efforts before and after—it was not so much because of a lack of support in high quarters, as because the dynasty of the silk hat was already tottering on its throne, although nobody at that time suspected it, or felt the approach of the revolution which was to convert its empire into a republic, and bring Panamas and tweed caps into the heart of Piccadilly. In the days of which we write—and for all their antiquity they are not so very far remote, since a whole decade of the ancients means no more in strict value of time than a modern year, where the cut of a dress-coat alters vitally as many times as six in one season—in those days even gentlemen wore silk hats on Sunday, like cabmen and commercial travelers during the week.

So, as the silk hat then was as appropriate to Sunday as the Harris tweed and golf stick now, and it was as correct to go to church in those days as it is in these to stay away, the Poet could laugh with indulgence at Bella's vanity, and say in her mother's own words: "What a funny girl you are, Bella!" which, of course, was polite periphrasis for "I will." Perhaps, too, his laughter was reinforced by the invasion of a more volatile quality that suddenly poured into it, but Bella

was too much engrossed with gratitude to notice that. Besides, almost at that very moment the bells stole in at the Poet's windows, one after another—an octave of them—like veritable human beings, filling the room with their vibrating bodies, and converting Bella's gratefulness into startled urgency and apprehension. Quick! O my! Those were the bells at last; weren't they beautiful! Bella knew they could not be far away; she had been expecting them all the morning. The Poet must eat up his breakfast without delay, for no time was to be lost. And meanwhile Bella would run home and put on her hat and gloves, and fetch her sunshade and prayer-book.

XV

WHEN Bella returned, which she did with magic haste, prettily flushed; her lips apart for accelerated breathing, and her eyes bright with eagerness and activity, the Poet was already awaiting her by the window. She panted into the room with an outburst of commendatory radiance: "O my! You *have* been quick!"—and then of a sudden the light in her eyes died curiously down, as if the material of its flame had been but insubstantial stuff. After all——

After all—were silk hats and Sunday clothes such eminently desirable things? Could it be, for example, that they varied very much in their capacity to bestow? Were silk hats and frock coats as capricious in their effect upon men, as fabrics and colors upon women—with as much power to damage as enhance?

The Poet looked—or was it the window-light behind that aged him?—years older. To Bella it seemed he might have been his own father, pertaining to a world and age she did not know. Except for the familiar smile which greeted her, and the familiar voice, here might have stood some individual with whom Bella had no acquaintance. Between the hat of Bella's fancies and this hat of hard fact was a woful discrepancy. Its brim—when the Poet donned it in indication of readiness—its brim was flush with his eyebrows. But for his ears, which it caused to protrude like brackets, Bella felt there was nothing to restrain it from slipping altogether over his head to the nape of his neck, after

the fashion of a candle-extinguisher. And then the size! And the height! And the solidity! It might have been carved out of solid wood. And the coppery brown color of it! Despite all her principles of politeness Bella's eyes grew big, coming to the surface of a transparent curiosity like fishes to the glass side of a tank, fascinated by what they saw. And perhaps their gaze was rendered more audacious by the Poet's disregard of it, for he seemed in the happiest manner unaware of Bella's attention, and hummed lightly through his lips with the utmost geniality and good spirits, as he drew on a creased and Sabbath-looking black kid glove, devoid of a button, and suspiciously attenuated about the finger-ends, remarking how favored they were by the weather.

"O my, yes!" assented Bella's lips, but her eyes took no part in the remark, fascinated by the heavy hat and the flaccid glove.

"Indeed," said the Poet, drawing on the second glove, "without exaggeration one might almost describe it as a lovely day. I really cannot remember at the moment a day—at this particular time of year—that promised better."

"O my, yes!" responded Bella's lips once more.

"Well, then," exclaimed the Poet, beating the palms of his withered gloves together with a fine air of conclusion, "let's go and take part in it, shall we? There's nothing more to wait for. I'm ready if you are, Bella. *Aren't* the bells ringing?"

"O my, aren't they?" said Bella, in a very oblique and thin and unconvincing voice, motionless at the corner of the breakfast table, her two hands linked together by the red morocco prayer-book on the table-edge.

"Yes—I'm ready." And after a pause: "I think,

perhaps I wouldn't wear the gloves, Roo, if I were you. It's not a bit cold. I think I'd carry them in my hand, with the fingers doubled. And isn't that a hole? O my, it is! The button's come off, too. Did you know?"

The Poet exclaimed: "Button?" in a tone of vagueness, and looked at the glove with surprising leniency. It astonished Bella to see how little his eye was troubled by its patent deficiencies. If the absent button had been merely a crumb he could not have dismissed it more lightly.

"O, that's nothing," he said with large indifference. "There was only one button to start with. And buttons are not being quite so much worn this season. Besides, they stop the circulation. Come along, Bella."

"Yes," said Bella, still motionless, but making believe to put her own gloves in order for departure, with a touch to this finger and a touch to that. "I'm coming."

The Poet adjusted his hat by the mirror, and pulled the coat into position over his shoulders. It was indeed—had Bella known enough of classics or antiquities to make the distinction—more like the *toga virilis* than a coat, swathing his bust with folds, but the Poet seemed oblivious of any external change in himself, and was as gay as always, if not more so, crying: "Come along then, Bella. Let's join the throng." He made a step toward the door, and the hat responded with a lurch, subsiding in heavy torpor over his left ear.

"It's going to be hot," Bella said, leaving the table corner with reluctance, still adjusting her gloves. "O my! It's going to be frightfully hot."

"Perhaps you'd rather go for a walk?" the Poet suggested, showing the most friendly disposition to oblige. "Just as you like, Bella. You have only to say so. I'm at your service."

"O no, I wouldn't," Bella replied hurriedly. "I'd rather go to church. But—but do you really care so very much about wearing a silk hat this morning? I don't mind a bit. O my! nobody minds. Wear just whatever you like, Roo. What does it matter?"

The Poet lifted off the heavy headgear and brought it down beneath his observation.

"Wear any hat I like! When I've promised to wear this hat for your sake! And because you asked me! What do you take me for, Bella? Do you think I break my promises as easily as that. No. Never!" And the hat went decisively back upon his head, sinking down to his ears, and doubling them over and obliterating them, with a sound of air compressed and escaping.

"Break your promise?" Bella said, aghast at the mere suggestion. "O my! Indeed, you wouldn't. Never. But silk hats—silk hats are such big things, aren't they? O my! Ever so much bigger than I'd thought—and heavy. Don't they make your head ache? They would mine. Is it a winter hat?"

"A winter hat!" The Poet brought it off again, by an uplifting suctional process involving the use of both hands, and held it before the strong light of an injured and protesting gaze. "There is something behind all this, Bella. You have been speaking and acting and looking very strangely for some time past. Don't think me unobservant. Is it that you are ashamed of the hat? Be cruel enough, Bella, to tell the truth."

"Well, Roo," said Bella, with soft concern, "I must say this. Of course, the hat is a very beautiful hat. It must have cost a great deal of money some time. I don't want to know how much. Perhaps a frightful lot. Mamma's hats do. But I don't think it suits you—and Leonie's hat doesn't suit her—and she says mine doesn't

suit me. Does it? Put on your other hat, Roo—any of them—and your other coat. And don't bother a bit about gloves. I'll go without mine, too, if you like, and then we shall both be the same. And I'll take off my buckle shoes if you'd rather."

And then she paused, having caught sight of an apparition in the Poet's look, like a face at a window, and suddenly burst into radiance, crying: "O my! It's all a joke. I know it is. It's all a joke, isn't it, Roo? O my! How funny! And what a funny hat! I've never seen a funnier hat. I've never seen a hat half so funny before. Nor half so large. Wherever did you get it? Is it Mr. Herring's? It must be! I'm sure it is. It came out of the cupboard next to the bathroom, where the carpet-sweeper is. And the gloves! They're lovely. And the coat—that's part of the joke, too, isn't it?" she asked anxiously. "O my! How mamma will laugh!"

Whereat she took the hat into her hands, and stroked it both ways, felt the weight of it; measured it, dropped it, and even made believe to kick it—to such effect that one could have sworn one heard the kick. At least, the Poet could, and so could Bella.

Then Rupert departed with his purloined stock-in-trade—even to the cupboard as Bella had divined, returning this next time in a miraculous frock suit of silvery gray, and a silk hat as sleek and shiny as a seal when it pushes its head out of the water; and gaiters of the purest white; and suède gloves, and a full-aproned tie of shot silk, between the shades of London smoke and pigeon blue, on which the crimson fire of an amethyst gleamed. He was, indeed, a figure of whom any tailor or man-servant might be proud—let alone such a naturally venerating little human as Bella Dysart. No properly brought-up young lady of

the least culture or feeling could have looked at the superb rectified crease down the center of each leg of his trousers without a thrill, and no man of spirit without envy. That such garments were ever to be debased to the usages of common worship; to be subjected to the rigors of pews and the brutality of church hassocks was unthinkable. And yet, though the Poet's sense for elegance in raiment was quite as keen and nearly as noted as his sense of poesy, and provoked indulgent mirth amongst his friends, he possessed that rarer art which disguises and condones its more mechanical properties. As he wore his hat, for instance, it became an object of lightness and buoyancy, sitting on his head as easily as a smile on his lips, and becoming him nearly as well. And then, the frock coat, that dangerous garment of dreadful vicissitudes, of showmen, and bookmakers, and undertakers, and politicians, the pinnacle of social formalism and the sartorial formula for "I am arrived," or "*C'en est fini*," hanging over broken-kneed wretchedness like a blanket over a flinching cab-horse; the frock coat, that can expose more of a man than ever it covers, and make your upstart as naked as on that first day the doctor handled him—the frock coat fitted our Poet with all the aptness of a quotation.

Its cut conformed most scrupulously to fashion, and yet so as to escape its slavery, proclaiming the wearer to be a free worshiper and no Helot. On the Poet's shoulders it left liberty for thought; a man might wear such a garment, and still have room to think for himself; the very amplitude and balance of its skirt suggested an emancipated mind, a spirit freed from conventional fetters, one who wore culture lightly, like his clothes.

XVI

THAT was a great occasion for Bella. To walk possessively by the Poet's side to church, as though here was somebody who very much belonged to her at last, and take stray peeps at the coat and scarf-pin, and catch radiating glints from the silk hat, and stars from her own buckles and the Poet's shining shoes—how good this was! And to cull all the admiring glances leveled at him; and put up her sunshade in the bright places, and lower it nonchalantly when they reached the shade, like mamma; and set it gaily spinning now and then to accompany laughter, as she had seen Mrs. Dysart do; and take toll of all other hats and all other coats, and all other shoes, and stock of all other church-goers, gazing at them with eyes so frankly interested and lips so friendly that her look was virtually a greeting, exchangeable at the slightest flicker of reciprocal friendliness into a smile or nodding of the head!

For with the world at large Bella lived on the visible best of terms. Houses, front doors, creaking shoes, strange frocks, unfamiliar faces, the most unpromising of babies in perambulators, ragged children prodigiously dirty, and the profanest looking of men stimulated her sympathetic curiosity to a degree only short of positive affection. And then, how fascinating to pass through this Sunday Spathorpe, all its familiar features translated, as it were, into a strange dead language, with no French pianos glittering chromatically at street corners,

and no peripatetic string bands, and no cornet players blowing melody or moisture out of their instruments; and no niggers with large white collars and enormous jam-colored mouths, plucking invitingly with the banjo at public attention as they parade the thoroughfares in quest of their promised land. A hushed and altered Spathorpe, with the most perpendicular of Sabbath smoke, mounting consonantly from its chimneys as if the very chimney pots sang hymns; and all its business eyelids sanctimoniously lowered, save here and there, where through a skewed or ill-drawn blind Bella caught glimpses of the secular week-day eye, peeping out at her from some shop window—a Spathorpe animated principally by worshipers and bells.

It becomes, as they walk, a positive *mêlée* of bells, each outvying the other after the manner of hucksters in a market, clamorous and competitive. Little service bells of no breeding and the most objectionable of voices, are let loose like ill-mannered curs, barking at the big bells from St. Margaret's. All is aerial discord and dissension, and the Poet feels strengthened in a view long held by him that if the power were his he would interdict all single bells as vagabonds, and melt them down into flat-irons or something serviceable, and sanction no belfry music but the full peal. Time itself seems accelerated by this riot of ringing; palpitating with hurried pulses. The urgency transmits itself to worshipers; footsteps are quickened; faces grow flushed; prayer-books oscillate violently at the extremity of arms, swung in aid of locomotion. Then, as if exhausted, the bells grow faint and languid; their sound falters, and of a sudden fails. The tense sinews of time relax and slacken, and a great serene silence comes up and takes possession of the sky. The sacred spirit of the day, suppressed and beaten by all

these clangors, mounts supreme at last. The ungodly about the ways hear spiritualized Amens that dawn like the opening of gates in Heaven and as celestially close, soft disembodied responses, purged of all material dross, the slow expansion of hymns in blue space, unfolding from the deep bosom of invisible organs, blossoming after awhile with countless elevated voices of the blessed.

But before St. Margaret's bells have altogether ceased to fling their echoes over the town, how good to climb the great high hill under the reverberation of them, mounting joyously above tier upon tier of ancient Spathorpe tiles and sleepy chimneys, and reach the old gray church at last in its midway perch below the castle walls; the weathered house of God that Bella knows so well by sight and has so often looked at from the high vantage of the Esplanade across the bay. By the sunny southern porch she pauses with the Poet awhile, for the porch is still full of unabsorbed parasols and whispering millinery, and the two take a sentimental peep at the serene semicircle of blue sea, and all that white and recent Spathorpe that rises up into the sky beyond, over the churchyard palings and ranks of recumbent dead. Like ships within a roadstead the crowded gravestones lie—foundering ledgers and reeling headstones, all transfixed in postures suggestive of the rude seas of eternity, pitching storm-tossed still to their final doom, as if one mortal shipwreck did not suffice for the moldering mariners and seamen that fill so many of these unlevel graves. So closely do they lie together that in places there is scarce room for the grass to push its green fringe between their stones, and differentiate dead from dead. Here and there a hawthorn has its roots deep down in what these worn slabs commemorate, and thrusts up a twisted stem through

the stony decay, crowned with a canopy of leaves that shine in the sun and form a little pool of shade upon the graves below.

Bella views these stones with gentle awe, and says a soft O my!—for though she knows two at least of London's largest capitals of the dead, her mind is always susceptible to the cumulative wonder. Bella knows nothing of the dead; never in her life has she met this mystery at first hand, or confronted the pallid statuary of death. But the word has a solemn wonder of its own, to be uttered with a falter of the underlip, and she pities all dead people from the bottom of her heart, and thinks how dreadful it must be to live beneath this weight of masonry—if what be said of death be true—shut off from the warmth and the softness of breezes and the blueness of sea and sky. To this morning and these moments by the porch with Bella is clearly attributable the Poet's "Soul Haven"—that every schoolgirl knows—perhaps the most spontaneous and sincere of all his minor poems, and bearing not the slightest trace that its sentiments were conceived in white spats and varnished boots. The first line came shaped and metered into the Poet's mind—from what shadowy "whence" he knew no more than we—as Bella's fingers stole toward his and possessed them softly, as though for companionship in the presence of these dead, with a sense of shared gladness and thanksgiving, too, for her own and his vitality, and the radiant warmth and beauty of the life they lived in. Before the end of the sermon the Poet had composed quite six verses, including those familiar lines—so often the text for scholastic paraphrase—wherein he likens the sound of the organ, rising up in a subterranean tremor from the very vaults at their feet, to the liberated spirits of the dead, de-

claring music to be the tide of intercourse between the Deity and those that sleep in Him, renewed until the last great day when the diapasons shall roll open the deeps of earth and sea, and the universe shall pour forth a music whose notes are to be human souls, mounting up in serene symphonic splendor to join issue with the eternal sunlight of God. For, while he and Bella stood, softly hand-linked together, the ground beneath them stirred like living flesh, as if the dead moved, and the church walls shook, and the sleeping edifice seemed to wake and draw breath through its huge lungs, until the stained glass windows quaked and the sunlight trembled in turn, and all these circumjacent solid and substantial things melted, as it were, into the permeating current of music, and the world of the dead and of the living, and the seen and the unseen, and the material and immaterial became one, tenuous and beautiful, as transitory and eternal as thought itself.

Thus listening they had to wait awhile, and even heard the raising of the opening hymn. Above the music of the organ the uplifted voices of the darkened congregation bloomed with a plaintive freshness like daisies on a grave-sward. For in Spathorpe during those seasonable weeks the churches are as much sought after on a Sunday as the Parade on a week day. Every one that has a pretty frock or a new hat becomes a worshiper, as does everybody that goes in search of them, and there are not pews enough in Spathorpe for all the piety that would express itself.

And though the High Church of Holy Ethelred on the South Cliff is—or was at this time—by universal proclamation the proper habitation for patent leather and supercilious silk, and gold-topped vinaigrettes and piety in the latest and most fashionable perfumes, and yawns behind suède gloves, and sovereigns in the collecting

bags—which are here as broidered as a lady's satchel, and faintly aromatic through course of time by contact with the scents of many soft-gloved fingers—still the ancient Parish Church of Holy Margaret, crowning the irregular roofs and crooked chimneys and wooden balustrades of the olden town, calls its quota too of pilgrims from the formal southern side, and its bricked and weather-beaten porch is earlier besieged. In August its dusty vergers assume the dignity of black rods and gentlemen ushers about a court; their nostrils are characterized by a superior curve, as though the drains were defective, and their eye is as much solicited as the heavenly Ear. From the assembled millinery and press of flounces about the porch they pick out a hat here and a petticoat there, with a regal beckoning of finger or mere compression of lip, that casts the bondage of solemn silence over the selected, and leads them, nervous and subdued, behind the draughty condescension of the gown to such position in the edifice as seems suitable to the worshipers' garb and demeanor.

For the Poet's part, he would have been content enough to sit with Bella upon some sunny ledger, and taste those finer essences of worship that can alone be culled when the human elements in it are judiciously eliminated, just as a flower—for the proper scenting of its fragrance—may be held too near the nostril. Heard from without, the sound of human thanksgiving takes on a quality more divine, as if already these sounds of praise were acceptable to God, and transubstantiated into somewhat of Himself. The gray walls screen the coughs of an impatient congregation; without, no feet are heard to stir, nor wandering glances arrest and check the flow of that inner self-consciousness and reflection which, in its highest quality, is worship. But vergers, through much communion with their kind, become keen readers

of the human countenance, and have wisdom to winnow, far in advance of that last day, the true ear from the husk, knowing your perfect gentleman from that base counterfeit of him whose pretensions rise no higher than the words "Thank you"; and while the blissful alternative of a seat in the sunlight shines upon the Poet's brow, the senior verger emerges from the sacred edifice, parting the residuary assemblage to right and left with a grandiloquent cleavage of his wand—as if he might be Moses, and they the Red Sea—and confides to the Poet in a whisper half the size of his hand, that he may perhaps be able to procure for the Poet two special places in a choice locality underneath the lectern, if he and the young lady will follow him.

So behind the fluttering wings of this rusty gown, puckered up at the shoulders into a dingy velvet yoke that fascinates Bella's eye, they quit the sunlight and the palpitating warmth of it deflected from these vertical and diagonal tombs, and pass into the dim profundity of the church, where all the collected faces that turn at their entrance seem mere blots at first, and their silhouetted hats like shapes half-seen in dreams; and the church itself a catacomb, filled with the reverberation of voices, and the smell of sawdust-stuffed hassocks, and salty flagstones.

XVII

BELLA enters into the service with a zeal that amuses and delights the Poet. Once installed in the pew her eye makes friends with all its new surroundings, with the subdued stone pillars, and the stained windows, and the mural tablets, and the rustling hats, and profiles, and every eye that meets her own. She peeps at the lowered shoulders and puckered sleeves of the worshipers in the pew before, and the foreheads and spread fingers and protruding nose-ends of the worshipers overhanging her from the pew behind—and this without the least restlessness or impiety, for if the spirit of worship does not dwell in Bella's eyes it has its residence nowhere upon earth. Her voice is heard in every Amen, sometimes with a little quaver of intensity that seems to express how grave and dear the word is to her. And when the priestly tones invite the congregation of the faithful to follow him with a pure heart and humble spirit unto the Throne of the Heavenly Grace, Bella's clarid voice undertakes the pilgrimage and keeps company with all the rest, confessing her sins with the pious unction of an old and hardened offender, to whom peccadilloes are almost become palatable; just as if she had any sins to speak about, or had done or left undone anything that could render her gray eyes and tender lips one whit less dear to the Heavenly Father on whose hassock and in whose house she kneels.

And in the Credo, when the organ gives the in-

toning priest his key, and then spreads out a rolling harmonic carpet for the faith of the worshipers to walk on, Bella's voice rises to the note established, and audibly believes in God the Father, and His Only Son, and the Blessed and glorious Trinity, and the Communion of Saints, and the Resurrection of the Dead, and the Life Everlasting, and all those other tenets that have perplexed the doctors and lit bonfires beneath the crackling limbs of faith. As for the hymns, Bella greets them like old friends, finding first the Poet's place for him, and then her own, with a twofold pleasure and importance, crossing one knee over the other, and laying the hymn book over that, and turning the pages with anxious urgency to be in time for the great uprising. At the first line of every verse something eager stirs behind Bella's lips, like the couching lark that spreads its wings for flight from the grass; then her voice takes wing and soars fearlessly into the thin treble ether of song; now high, now low; hovering in irresolute suspension above her, or poised on one long level note; at one moment bright, at another sad, alighting softly at the hymn's close and folding its pinions with meek and solemn submission.

Her fearlessness astonishes the Poet. She enters the portal of the least familiar hymns without a moment's hesitancy, showing more piety in her demeanor, but not less self-possession, than if she were with her mother shopping. Her voice has the outspoken candor of her own eyes; it conceals nothing; takes no shelter behind these other voices so discreetly and tentatively raised, that cling close to the cover of the general hum, and contribute their individual portions to the public praise as furtively as the meager coin slipped into the collecting plate. Of such subterfuges Bella's voice, as yet, is happily innocent. Here and there, in the press

of devotion, a word of puzzling lineament may escape her, or her eye, momentarily elevated to a gaze of rapture, may lose connection with the printed source of it, and be for a moment as free of earthly ties as her prototype the lark.

But like the lark, once mounted her singing does not cease. Words at best are but a clumsy expedient, incontinent vessels for the higher emotions, as every singer is aware. True rapture knows nothing of them, and Bella sings from the heart always, never from the head—except that, at a pathetic word, or touching line, she may be observed to shake it. Always at the conclusion of each hymn there is a flush of gladness over her cheeks, and a look of renewed amiability in her glance, which she turns to either side and to the back of her as though to make acquaintance with the visible spirit of song upon these surrounding countenances before the next prayer obscures it.

The Poet lacks the true congregational soul; the concourse of his kind inclines him more to silence than to song. For one thing he nurtures no hallucinations in respect to his voice, and cannot believe that a cultured Deity would wish to be worshiped by any such imperfect means. But after awhile he essays to join Bella, not in any spirit of emulation, but that the sound of her small and solitary voice, so alone and yet so fearless, seems to reproach him with the gentlest charge of desertion. Therefore, toward the end of each first verse, or as soon as he feels assured of familiarity with the tune's outline, he begins to grope cautiously for the bass, as though he were seeking matches in the dark, and makes a pleasant and companionable murmur in Bella's left ear. Of this, politely, Bella takes no notice first of all. After awhile she grows curious to know what he is really doing down there, like a plumber mys-

teriously at work in the basement, and twice at least her own voice ceases as if to make place for these newer and more diffident tones. But on each occasion the Poet's singing subsides with her own, and they face each other in motive-seeking stillness for a space, or Bella strives to decipher the inscrutable gaze with which the Poet looks before him.

When from the pulpit was given the signal for the great sitting backward, and pews creaked, and feet stirred, and petticoats rustled, and the congregation made preliminary trial of its coughs, and the man in white cast the bread of his text upon the subsiding waters, then Bella drew closer to the Poet's sleeve, and sought for his hand, and squeezed it with a devout fervor as if to confirm and communicate piety, and fell straightway dreaming against the Poet's shoulder.

Bella did not call it dreaming. Bella called it listening to the sermon, but here the Poet and an historian may smile. Every now and then Bella would fly down from where she had built a nest for her thoughts in one of the rafters, and dip the keen beak of an appreciative attention into the preacher's words, then back to the roof to spread warm wings over the fledglings of her fancy and feel herself as good as gold. For the sermon is a scattering of crumbs, there for the need; food, and you take your fill, according to capacity and appetite, and such bird-like souls as Bella's subsist on the smallest of meals; their own happiness sustains them, and indeed it must be an austere divinity that asks of these a better worship than this. Bella's dreams partook less of the nature of dreams than of extemporized dialogues between the two of her—I and Me—for even in thought for the most part Bella sought to clarify her own meaning to herself through words, giving it substance, as it were, and a shape. Sometimes her dreams would be in

essence homilies, delivered by one half of her to the other, on sundry or special duties.

"And to-day I must not enjoy myself aloud, for Leonie has a headache. And I have to feel dreadfully sorry. And so I am. And after a little while I must ask Leonie again how she does. But not too soon, for that will only make her cross and say: '*Mon Dieu!* Is a sick headache to be cured with questions?'"

Or the dreams were tender appreciations of her mother, the choicest blossoms of Bella's love, plucked and garlanded and scented with a dutiful delight, and offered implicitly to the better of the two Mrs. Dysarts, the spiritual and metamorphosed mother who had her habitation in Bella's bosom.

Offerings to her beauty: "Mamma is very beautiful!—yes, indeed! Nobody in the world is a thousand times half so beautiful as mamma. Mamma says she's not a bit as beautiful as lots of people, but I don't believe that. I believe mamma is. O my! But mamma says it because she's nice, and she says nice people must never speak the truth about themselves, except when it's nasty; or the truth about anybody else, except when it's nice. If they do, nobody will believe them. And that seems funny too, but I don't care. I know mamma is beautiful, and I know she's good, and I love her better than anybody else in the whole world."

Speculations on the nature of her mother's love: "Why does she love me so, I wonder? It can't be for what I've got, for I've got nothing at all except lots of nice things that mamma has bought for me herself; nice things that other girls have to be thankful for going without.

"I'm glad I'm not mamma, for then I should only have *me* to love, and I shouldn't love me half as much as she does. And O my! I shouldn't have anything

to give myself. No chocolates, and no shillings for my savings-box, and no money to buy mamma presents on her birthdays and other days. Whatever should I do without her?"

Or her dreams were slender yarns of fiction woven diligently on her little inventive loom, a thing of obvious mechanism, quaint as ninepins, primitive as the fig-leaf, yet capable of great results, too, beneath Bella's busy fingers.

One half would come and ask the other half: "Tell me a tale."

And the other half would purse its lips and put up its remindful forefinger and reply: "If you what?"

"If you *please*," the first half would answer humbly.

"Then," says the other half, "I am Aunt Jane from America. No, I am the poor woman that keeps the little goody shop, whose husband was killed in the shocking railway accident, and you're lame Bessie with a crutch."

"Be Uncle Alfred," pleads the first, "with a sword, and medals on his breast. And I'm Jim. Then we can have guns and talk deep. I'm tired of being lame any longer. It hurts my legs."

"No!" decides the second. "Don't let's be Uncle Alfred either. And we won't be the shepherd and his faithful dog, and be frozen to death again to-day. Let's be the Battle of Waterloo, and you're the French. And I don't like that, too. Let's be mamma. That's lovely. Let's. And I'm sitting on mamma's knee, and *I'm* mamma, and I must ask mamma for a tale, and that's *you*."

"Oh, how lovely! Now, I will ask."

"But mamma must be busy first of all. First of all mamma says there will not be time, for she is going out to a dinner party with that lovely rope of pearls

around her neck. And Leonie is waiting for her upstairs. But there *will* be time really—only it's ever so much nicer to begin by being disappointed. Then you enjoy things better. Now, ask. Give mamma a kiss like I always do."

"Mamma."

"Yes, darling?"

"That was a nice tale you told me, wasn't it? O my! Awfully nice."

"What tale was that, Bella?"

"That about the little girl whose sisters were unkind to her because she was so pretty, and made her drink out of the cat's bowl . . ."

"You liked it, Bella?"

"Oh, yes, indeed. Ever so much. I like all the tales you tell me. No one tells tales like you. Why don't you make them into a book? Please, tell me another, mamma."

"Another! O Bella! You seem to think mamma is made of tales. Not this evening, dear. Mamma has not a moment. She must go upstairs and dress for a horrid dinner party."

"Just one, mamma. Ever such a teeny one. Please—Oh, ever so many pleases!" (And then I give mamma a kiss, and say: "Well?" and mamma says: "Well!")

"Well?" (And then I say: "You will, won't you?" and mamma says: "O Bella, what a dreadful little limpet you are!")

"O Bella, what a dreadful little limpet you are!" (And then: "Once upon a time . . .")

"Once upon a time. There lived. Many years ago . . ."

And Bella's hand-loom begins to stir, and a little princess sits weaving herself into her own fairy-tale.

XVIII

THEN, one after another, the places of worship peal to the jubilant music of release, pouring out expansive congregations through darkened porches into the golden air; huge variegated caterpillars that eat their way with sinuous industry to the Esplanade.

For in these delectable *Bella-virumque* days the Spathorpe church parade is still an institution. It is the apotheosis of the secular parade, transported to the stately terrace of the cliff, where the crowd of fashion floats in Sunday languor, as conscious of its self-importance mirrored from eye to eye, as a swan that sits enthroned in pride upon his white reflection. All the least important people make it their business to be there, and many of the most important their pleasure. On this one morning of the week the Parade proper is deserted, and becomes the Parade very improper indeed. Nobody is to be found there except Nobody himself, or invalids wrapped in rugs, or detestable people who merely come to Spathorpe for their health, sniffing ostentatiously at its breezes, as though loth to lose one, and pointing with plebeian rapture at its bay. Inconsequential people who make no effort to conceal their feelings, and achieve all their pleasures in one suit of clothes. For these and such as these the Esplanade on Sunday morning is no place; for there formality stalks, a specter, and many move in patent fear of it. The feelings are led in leash like dogs of pedigree, not to be allowed association with the vulgar race of emotions;

and human beings make strange and fashionable shapes with their mouths, and seek and shirk each other's eyes; and manners are wonderfully grand. In the supreme half hour between devotion and lunch, thousands of feet trample their impress to and fro in the softened roadway, and tread out tears of aromatic tar, concerting a surfy turmoil that obliterates the murmur of the sea, and raising a fine impalpable dust to titillate the nostrils like snuff. From the high-reared bridge of iron, filigreed against the blue sky across the valley, that links the older Spathorpe with the new, to where ungodly builders play leapfrog with residential villas down the coast, and contend among themselves for the latest word and the last smell of bricks and mortar, the broad and undulating roadway becomes a channel scarcely adequate for the turgid stream of life; here intersected dizzily with cross-currents, there sucked into vortex-like circles of converse, now sweeping the full breadth of the Esplanade, or splitting on the prominence of a rubber-tired landau or open brougham, that breasts and cleaves the seething current like a rock; or a Bath chair half submerged in the human flood, behind the stooping shoulders of its attendant, some aged man more feeble than the freight he pulls. From the Poet's balcony, if he and Bella were but there to see, the stream shows thick and viscid; a syrup of slow-circulating colors like the gravely bubbling molten stuff of which the sugar sweets are made, whose hues attenuate and mingle, and yet refuse to melt.

There is a plethora of prayer-books. Hats describe parabolas to the balconies and to other hats. Every kind of hat over every kind of smile, last year's shape marveling at the monstrosity of this. The hot rails that surmount the steep cliff gardens of the Parade are lined with postured loungers of both sexes for half a

mile or more, some of whom have been rehearsing their attitudes during the past hour, in preparation for this public moment. Every phase of vanity finds expression. Men attitudinize over cigars; youth arrives at prodigious self-importance by means of the cigarette. The sexes are all agog with strife to impress and subjugate each other. Voices catching the epidemic of importance, rise in tonal rivalry and become competitive. Eyes grow disdainful, lips supercilious. Laughter is executed with all the care of a five-finger exercise. Everybody is acting more or less, and the disease, aggravated by numbers, spreads. Everybody is desirous of being taken for somebody else, and somebody better. Visitors at Spathorpe fail frequently to recognize their friends, and are not overjoyed to see them when they do; it is so much easier to act before strangers. And since this vast crowd is collected from all the four corners of the universe, and its units for the most part are quite unknown to each other, and there is no salutary curb upon the vanities, the most preposterous pretensions go abroad. It is a game of poker, with countenances and demeanors for the cards, and on the promenade the philosopher or the student of humanity may find, in half an hour, instruction or amusement enough. The moral virtues and sincerities have no value here; only the outward figuration counts. Except in the case of an exalted few, all this moving world judges and is judged by externals—a form of judgment that falls mercilessly on merit. If one had only known, for instance, that it was the duke himself who trod upon one's toes in the crowd around the Buffet, yesterday . . .

For the rest, actors with blue chins and black eyebrows are well received at Spathorpe—many of them much better there than behind the footlights. So are the men who look like them, men reminiscent of photo-

graphs seen in shop windows, of faces that celebrity has made more familiar to us than our own. Men who possess the air of having done something, or of never having done anything in their lives, may count on Spathorpe's favor, so long as they time their visit wisely and do not stay till they be known. If only you have beauty or ugliness enough, or a face that lends itself with ease to remembrance or caricature, or practice a daily habit on the Parade, be sure you will be noted in the end, and decorated with a nickname, and people will account you Somebody in this chaotic empire of externals, and remark your absence when you leave.

But for the Poet—though he and Bella contribute their footsteps to the sluggish mass of promenaders, and look and are looked at—the morning is less memorable for this than for his first meeting with Mrs. Dysart. Hitherto, he has seen of her nothing, now he is to see a great deal. She has been known to him only in the guise that Bella's lips have given her, childish glorifications rather than portrayals, so superlative that they serve, indeed, to whet the Poet's appetite, but yet to dull its edge, with preconscious disappointment. He thinks this Mrs. Dysart of his knowledge must be, after all, a mere exalted denizen of Bella's heart, having no counterpart in reality, born of love and nurtured in affection, and garbed in generous, donated qualities like beauty in a gift of furs. To-day, when Rupert and Bella have finished their promenade (which will be quite presently) our Poet is to adjust all these impressions by actual experience, remodel them if necessary, and (we have yet to learn) perhaps dispense with them altogether in favor of more reliable data.

XIX

CROMWELL LODGE, as every Spathorpe lover knows, stands in the shelter of the green and silent square behind the Esplanade, with a side-glance along the level asphalt of Cromwell Gardens to the sea. It is the large stuccoed hybrid-Gothic villa, made up of mullioned windows, with a crenellated parapet and an embattled porch, in which frowns a dark oak door studded with tremendous bolts, and hung on great hinges, and furnished with a portentous lyre-shaped knocker whose percussive tongue might wake the echoes of a convent. It memorializes the prosperity and the taste of a midland tradesman, who aspired to dignify retirement within these presumptuous walls, to fortify himself against the rude assaults of commerce, and sustain a siege against his own past. He died before the glaziers had removed their whitening from its windows, and the house descended into hands which relinquish it each season for lucre. Royalty, it is whispered, has found some entertainment there; and emerged from that frowning but not unfriendly porch, into the silent starlit Spathorpe of the pallid small hours; and through the house's seasonal vicissitudes some well known figures in the world of wealth and beauty have cast their shadows on its brilliant blinds.

The pages of its history, if not unsoiled, present at least an edge of opulent and gilded sanctity toward the world, and form matter for keen and interested perusal. In these days of Bella and the Poet, the house—though

neither of them knows it—is not less barometric of the brilliancy of the season than the fashionable Sceptre on the Esplanade, that Bella admires so much; or the vast Majestic that thrusts its three great cupolas high into the blue sky at the head of the South Bay. With the advent of each summer the eye of Spathorpe sharpens in its scrutiny of Cromwell Lodge for signs of occupancy, and calculates the chances of the season by the lateness or earliness of the decorator's work upon it. When the painters' ladders complicate its walls in April, and the window-cleaners wring out their wash-leathers while the spring winds still are keen enough to make their fingers blue, or the furniture van brings its gloomy bulk into the square before the leaves of the plane trees round the central grass plot have lost their first juvenile green, then a lengthier season may be apprehended, and Spathorpe—which lives as sadly as a hibernating tortoise when its visitors are gone—feels the congenial warmth of impending gaiety, and slowly comes to life again, and the house agent's clerk, with creased sleeves and ink on his celluloid cuff-protectors, runs around to the office of the *Spathorpe Mercury* with a paragraph announcing that Cromwell Lodge has been let by his firm for the month or season as the case may be, to Mrs. X or Mrs. Z, or the Hon. So and So and family, with tutor and governess and domestic staff; and the junior reporter of the *Spathorpe Mercury*—which is, or was, that limp and humid journal produced by bronchial gas-power in the side street of Cliffborough, that smokes when new like a bath towel in the sun, and is coated with such profusion of printer's ink as to give it the intensity of an obituary number. In winter it shrinks over an utter absence of news to no proportions at all, like a mendicant's shawl over a nipped stomach, swelling in summer to as much as four pages of visitors,

whose multitude makes so large a demand upon type that some of the names perforce must be re-spelled, or taxed of a letter, or entered in italics (which seems to suggest an aspersion on the owner's character) or ruthlessly shorn of their capitals to admit of inclusion at all—the junior reporter of the *Spathorpe Mercury*, filled with the exuberance of one who holds a shorthand certificate for eighty words a minute, and has done on occasions even more, hurries around Spathorpe with his notebook and stenographic pencil to take statistics of hotels and lodging-houses and painters and decorators, and compiles a forecast of the season so sanguine that by the next post advertisements of rooms to let reach the office a month before their wont. Whereupon the grocers and provision merchants wax active, and the butchers and dairymen, and the letter-box of Cromwell Lodge is gorged with daily circulars. And Spathorpe keeps its eyes upon the windows, too, for tokens of transformation—for Cromwell Lodge, it knows, is not to be occupied for nothing, and though poverty may be more honest, wealth is certainly more interesting. Despite its taste, the villa, locked in on two sides by its own walls, is not an undesirable shelter for summer idleness, and those who come and go through its studded door, or show their vestiges occasionally behind its solid mullions may count on being envied.

Bella does not lead the Poet through the battlemented porch this morning, but through the nearer, smaller door, deep sunk in the plaster of the side wall, which gives admission by a descent of two steps into the square of a sunlit garden. The garden is not large—indeed, the contrary; nor is it altogether private, for several upper windows of adjacent houses look down into it with differing degrees of frankness or obliquity; nor does it offer much by way of beauty other than

comes from the conjunction of sunlight with sheltered green. There is a molded concrete fountain in the middle of the lawn, whose slender jet of water dances merrily to an indefatigable tinkling tune; and in the mossy basin down below there are goldfish fanning their indolent fins, for Bella takes the Poet's hand and draws him across the grass to look at them. And there are two parterres ablaze with red and yellow begonias, whose fleshy blooms flag a little in the noonday heat; and set around about the lawn are rose standards, and in the border by the walls, green ferns and phloxes and tapering hollyhocks, between which and the rectangular lawn a gravel pathway runs. There is a florid summer-house, too, of so-called rustic woods, embowered in clematis and drooping jessamine, its doorway cut diagonally in shadow by the midday sun, and a blinding garden seat, white painted, which stares across the plot of green.

So much the Poet briefly notes as Bella takes his sleeve and draws him to the tinkling fish basin, whose finny occupants move with cool disdain beneath the sky-blue water in the shadow of their mirrored images, but scarcely have they stooped to contemplation before his mercurial little guide turns swiftly on her heel and blossoms all at once into the most radiant flowers of recognition, a nosegay of greetings, toward the large six-mullioned window, shaded by as many lowered sun-blinds, red and white, that thrusts its bay into the garden. Through the open sashes, in the dimness of the room beyond, a seated figure is rather to be divined than visible, but Bella's eyes are as penetrative as needles when it comes to love. She cries: "Mamma!" and claps her hands with all the joy for a rare butterfly, and speeds across the lawn to the big window, whose sill is higher than her forehead; laying her finger-tips

upon it, and jumping up for glimpses of the desired presence beyond, her lips voluble with words of greeting and inquiry.

At first, impulsively, she makes a skipping rope of all their morning's doings, leaping nimbly with her sentences to clear the interceptive sill, until the color mounts into her cheeks, and her hat slides down the cascade of golden hair upon her shoulders, and her breath begins to fail, when she casts the sport aside, conceding her strength expended. "O my! I can't any longer!" and calls the Poet whom already she has indicated to the presence beyond the sun-blinds, and clasps his one hand in both her hot ones, and says: "Now you shall see mamma!" and trips a naiad dancing measure in front of him, up the steps of the terrace, and through the double glass doors of a veranda conservatory, and so into the softly regulated light of the room where the presence sits, a room diffusing the characteristic odor of cool cretonnes, sweetened with Parma violets.

The spacious garden window has made no boastful promise of its size, for though divisible by folding doors the room runs the full depth of the house, and a second window at its farther end, no smaller, silhouetting the large fronds of a Kentia palm and the uplifted lid of a grand pianoforte, gives out upon the square, where the Poet catches a passing glimpse of vivid distant sunshades before Bella's fervent fingers draw him to where her mother sits. There she relinquishes the Poet's hand and flings herself upon her knees, throwing both arms possessively about her mother's waist and lays the rapidest of kisses on her mother's cheek, as if to let the Poet see what kind of being this is she loves and worships; and buries her face for a moment in the softness of her mother's bosom, rocking their combined

affections to and fro. Then: "This—" she says to Mrs. Dysart, withdrawing her countenance from its smothered resting place, "this is—" and stops at that as on a precipice, with the queerest little look of perplexity, turning twice from one to the other a bitten and embarrassed underlip. "O my! I don't know who it is exactly. I call him Roo. You don't mind, do you?" she asks the Poet pleadingly—"before mamma?" adding, with the prettiest tune of laughter over her predicament, "O my! I didn't know what to call you just at first. We never settled what it was to be, did we? And this—" she says, indicating the pronoun by a two-fold kiss of the clearest, "is mamma!"

XX

ALREADY the eyes of the Poet and Mrs. Dysart have made acquaintance over Bella's shoulder, smiling mutual recognition of the girl's dear inconsequence. Mrs. Dysart's eyebrows, whimsically elevated, confess the lenity that loves too well to judge, but there is a friendly keenness in her glance that seems to seek the Poet's judgment, pleading it may confirm her own indulgence. The hand she proffers over Bella's shoulder is very white and very slender, albeit the fingers that the Poet holds in his a moment are nothing fragile, but softly and taperingly fleshed. In their motion they agitate a faint warm fragrance—eau de Cologne, or one or other of those tenuous scents in which the Sex secretes and insinuates itself—the slightest waft, to the accompanying music of a bunch of golden mascots that hang from her wrist. Also, the fingers extended to the Poet's touch are ringed. Turquoise and emerald and blood-red ruby flash upon them with a vivacity that would be dangerous to flesh less fair, or a hand less shapely. Later, he is to associate these golden hoops and colored stones with an action that their owner makes familiar; the pensive twisting of them on her fingers when her eyes seek that distant solitude of vision enhancive of their depth and beauty.

For deep and beautiful they are. The oriental fervor of Bella's lips has not led truthfulness in this respect too far astray. Of a shade that eludes description, for which no term exists, be-

tween gray-blue and hazel, reticulated with violet, the smile that issues from them seems kindled with the clearness of light. Deeper eyes they are than Bella's, and more darkly lashed; the fringe that marks the movement of their lids is almost sable, and of such density that the merest drooping of them serves to screen her glance from observation. The light, perhaps, diffused and softened through the lowered blinds, is not too strict a censor of complexions; more flatterer than scrutineer, but it falls upon Mrs. Dysart's cheek with such a charity as to surprise the Poet. That this can be the mother of Bella makes him wonder. Sister he might have believed, for the resemblance between them protests relationship. Their features are of a mold; their profiles follow a pattern; in silhouette they might be one. It is difficult to distinguish anything of the father's influence in the girl's face. The smile of greeting on Mrs. Dysart's face is the smile made known to him by Bella, albeit more disciplined in the service and requisitions of society. The lips themselves are curiously similar; save only for the difference in depth and lash, their eyes are animated by looks so much alike as to impress almost comically the watcher of both, when he sees the daughter's glance conform by instinct to the rulings of the maternal eye, like an apt recruit reciprocating the motions of a drill sergeant. Now and again, when Bella's instinct for the look appropriate fails her, by a quick reference to her mother's face she regulates her countenance as surely and as swiftly as her voice would take the pitch from a note given. The years, of course, that have done so much to shape the correspondences of these two faces, have also wrought in them the traits of difference. Behind the external simplicity and singleness of Mrs. Dysart's countenance, there is that deeper and more complex knowledge born

of experience and the world. Maternity, too, shows in her face, for none but the most worthless of women can be a mother for nothing. Over her lips at times there creeps the ineffable look of pain that sits on them and lends the look of soul to beauty, that expression of gentle suffering which is so effective an alloy in loveliness, and may even be simulated by those women who know better how to steal advantage from sorrow than to suffer it.

And there are external differences, too, between Mrs. Dysart and her daughter. Bella's hair is golden—of that aureate hue which might give rise to base surmises, coiled on a woman's head. Mrs. Dysart's hair is of deep auburn, or rather that shade of burnished brown that shows its copper only in the sun, and throws a pale brow into luminous relief. Mrs. Dysart is scarcely taller than her daughter may before long aspire to be, though her form seems slenderer, and the woman's garments magnify height. But the points of physical divergence are wonderfully slight. It is in the informing spirit that most of the difference lies. Mrs. Dysart sits as Bella could not sit; her body, steeped in the soft cushions of her chair, derives a graceful advantage from the posture of repose. The play of her brows and lashes is leisurely, the motion of her head and hands slightly, though not superciliously, languid. The white lids of her eyes, thickly embroidered with their black lashes, could manifest disdain beyond the expression of Bella's franker lids. Over Bella's face the stream of fancy passes with a swift and busy current; behind Mrs. Dysart's eyes the tide of thought flows deeper and less ruffled in its channel; her countenance ripples with none of those dancing wavelets of expression that chase each other so quickly across Bella's face. She figures womanhood as Bella

images the child. The sight of her corrects, though without violence, the Poet's expectations. The unaffected shaping of her lips in speech, and the sound of her voice, put to flight the idea of epigrammatist, for all she sits, as Bella has depicted, amid the overflow of books and magazines, with volumes intimately tucked beside her and embedded in the cushions of her chair, and journals sliding from her knee to the carpet, extruding fashion-plates and colored toilettes. To these, a little later she makes laughing allusion, bidding Bella remove their offending fashion-plates from the Poet's eye—"The Woman's Book of Martyrs," as she calls them.

But that is when the Poet is seated on the chair that Bella has been whispered to provide for him, and Bella has relieved him proudly of his hat and gloves, in doing which she cannot resist the temptation first of all to display the former admiringly to her mother's notice, saying: "Look, mamma! Isn't it a beauty!"

Mrs. Dysart, with a glance at the Poet, shapes lips of hushful remonstrance, and tells her daughter: "Those, Bella, are things we *think!*"

"Yes, and so do I," says Bella with fervid assent. "I've been thinking so all the morning. I did wish you could have seen it. It looked lovely coming out of church."

With such a unifying element as Bella in their midst they slide into conversation with the ease for an intimacy renewed rather than an acquaintance begun.

"Indeed, you are no stranger to me," Mrs. Dysart informs the Poet. "I seem to know you so well already, part through your verse, which I have often read, and then through Bella."

Her voice has the richness that Bella's may some day acquire, although its tones are neither deep

nor ringing. Their quality lies more in a mellow warmth suffusing speech like mild sunlight, and giving a clear serenity to her words. It is a rhythmic voice with music in it, that lifts and falls between the points of such a wide inflection as to impart to her spoken words the character almost of melody, very fascinating and agreeable to the ear, and a golden vehicle—as the Poet thinks—for the chariotting of fame. When Mrs. Dysart speaks, the inflected outline of her voice is reinforced with a delicate modulation of the brow, that renders the intention of each stress and accent visible, and illustrates, and at the same time wonderfully softens, speech.

“Bella has told me so much about you. She must be a terrible nuisance, Mr. Brandor!”

Bella cries: “O mamma!” and, “Am I, Roo?”

And the Poet interposes a hearty “Not at all.”

“Still,” Mrs. Dysart continues, “it would have been dreadfully dull without you for us.” Her speech expands from a grateful smile. “You can’t think what pleasant company you have been to me after my stupid illness. Do you know, I have read twice through your ‘Mnemosyne’s Daughters’ since Bella met you, and at times I felt sure I could catch the very tones of your voice. The verses might have been your lips. I seemed to understand them infinitely better by what I know of you through Bella. I have been wanting so much to see you for myself and share something of Bella’s privilege—Oh, yes! your mamma has been jealous of you, Bella—and to thank you for all your poetry and kindness, and those lovely flowers.” Her eyes, led by the allusion, go forth on a butterfly excursion from bowl to bowl. “Violets are my passion. Ever since I was a child I have loved the look and scent of them. I could die, I think, more easily in their fragrance.”

Bella turns apprehensive lips at this ominous mention of death.

"But you are not going to die, mamma! Not for ever so long. O my! Dr. Hayhew says so—and you know you promised me you wouldn't."

Mrs. Dysart laughs the gravity from Bella's face, with a reflected look of amusement from that to the Poet.

"O no, not yet, I hope!" she says. "You funny girl! There are so many lovely things to live for—poetry and friendship, and the sweetest hypocrisy. When mamma talks of dying, it is a sign she feels much better. Mr. Brandor will tell you that all his saddest poetry is composed as a luxury for happiness. Only happy people know how to be really sad. Did not a little girl come recently to her mamma and tell her: 'O, mamma! I feel so sorrowful!' and when her mamma asked: 'Why?' was not her answer: 'I don't know. But I think partly because it's been such a lovely day, and I've enjoyed myself so much'?"

Bella's face lights up at the allusion, and her lips sing joyously: "That was me. O my! Yes, I remember. I was frightfully sad that evening."

"Ah, Bella!" her mother tells her. "It is beautiful, playing at being sad when one is young. When one is older, one has to play at being happy. That is ever so much harder."

"There!" cries Bella to the Poet, with radiant pride. "O my! What did I tell you! Doesn't mamma say some funny things? I love them. Don't you?"

Mrs. Dysart and the Poet exchange laughter.

"Some very true things, Bella!" her mother assures her. "But Truth deceives us all when we are children. She begins by being ever so kind, like the new teacher, and it's only when we grow older and she sets us harder

tasks that we find how horrid she is. Perhaps, when we grow very, very old, we may come to like her better again, and think her not so hateful after all." She breaks off with a laugh. "But, good gracious! Don't let us talk about such disagreeable things. We are quite forgetting our manners, Bella. Truth is never mentioned in company. So you have been to church this morning."

Bella cries: "O mamma!" in a voice of celestial rapture, like a choir of angels liberated and ascending, as though the subject opened gates in Heaven. "It was lovely. We did wish you had been with us. Didn't we, Roo? Next time you must come, too, and we will all sit together. You shall sit between us both. No, I'll sit between you both. No, you shall sit between us both. O my! I don't mind a bit. Just however you like."

"I am sure it would be more interesting than these stupid magazines. No sermon could be quite so dull."

"Our sermon wasn't dull. It was lovely. Wasn't it, Roo? I had hold of Roo's hand all the time. The clergyman was beautiful. He coughed so sadly, and had the sweetest tremble in his voice. And such a lovely what-do-you-call-it over his shoulders."

"And what was the text?"

"O my!" Bella's lips shaped and unshaped themselves over the formation of a reply, with more willingness than wisdom, finally subsiding in despair. "I've forgotten that."

"Perhaps Mr. Brandor can help you?"

The Poet shook a guilty head. "I was relying on Bella. I believe it came out of the Collect."

"Then I am as wise as you both—for all I have been turning the pages of magazines till my wrist aches, to try and find something I could read. I think I need

not go to church next Sunday, after all. Tell me about the dresses. Those are much more important. Nobody knows whether the sermon improves us or not, but everybody can tell when a hat does not suit us. Were there any *very* pretty frocks, Mr. Brandor?"

"I did not see any."

"Then I fear there must have been. It is woman's complaint that man never sees her at her best."

Bella broke in: "O, mamma! There were lots and lots—ever such lots of the loveliest frocks. Roo said he liked mine, too—didn't you, Roo? Say you did, so mamma can hear you."

"Indeed I did."

Bella throws up to her mother a triumphant "There!" In this new domain of recollection her memory proves all-sufficing. There is scarcely a frock she has not noted, or a precise shade or hue she lacks the faculty to describe. To the Poet, who preserves the memory of all these worshipers as a mass, a phalanx of identities showing an almost solid frontage to the assaulting eye, it is an astonishment to learn with what prowess Bella has pierced their ranks and reduced a corporate crowd to units. Hats, frocks, gloves, shoes and stockings; looks, smiles, and even eyebrows glimpsed momentarily over pew-ledges, are stored indelibly in the crowded repository of the girl's mind. She sits by her mother's side, with her two arms embracing her mother's knee, and her face sometimes laid against it, sometimes uplifted as if to drink of the chalice of her mother's laughter, or take visible joy in her mother's countenance. From her rapturous gaze on this she turns it, filled with love and pride, toward the Poet, in a glance that cries as plain as speech: "Isn't she a darling! I love her. I think she's sweet." And from contemplation of the Poet in turn she flashes

looks of invitation to the face above her, seeming to ask its acquiescence in her own admiring affection: "Say you like him, too, mamma! O my! I'm sure you must. He's lovely."

Nor can this allegiant quality be restrained to looks alone. Prompted by a friendlier outburst of laughter, in whose circle they are drawn momentarily close to one another, it escapes Bella's custody and finds outlet in speech through the startling inquiry: "O my! How do you like mamma? Is she just what you'd expected?" which Mrs. Dysart will not let the Poet answer, reproving her daughter: "Fie, Bella! What a dreadful question to ask. Do you want Mr. Brandor to tell a story when he is only just back from church? Of course, he has not had time to make up his mind yet—and the question would be more dreadful than ever if he had. That is why wise people never form an opinion, lest foolish people should ask them for it. Besides, 'liking' is only for little girls, who ought to like everything and everybody, not for grown-up people, who are expected to like nothing."

"Dr. Hayhew likes you," Bella declared, "and he's grown up. Ever so much more grown up than Roo."

"But Dr. Hayhew's only a doctor," Mrs. Dysart reminded the girl. "One must not take doctors too seriously. They will all tell you we don't."

"He brings mamma a rose every morning," Bella declared, directing her information to the Poet, in despair of overcoming this other adversary in argument. "Ever such a lovely one—on purpose for her. Look! There it is. You can tell he's been this morning." She pointed at the delicate William Allan Richardson with a finger of triumph.

"You silly girl!" Mrs. Dysart apostrophized her, drawing back the golden head and shedding her amuse-

ment over Bella's brow. "Dr. Hayhew has lots of roses like that in his brougham, and leaves one with every lady he visits. You may always know a lady's doctor by his button-hole. It is part of the treatment, Bella. But for these little attentions many women would never take the trouble to be ill at all."

Bella demanded: "What did he tell you this morning, mamma?"

"He said he was afraid I was nearly quite well again, Bella. I'm afraid I am, too. It makes one feel very ordinary, Mr. Brandor, to have one's health once more; it is like descending from poetry to prose. One is not interesting even to oneself when one ceases to be an invalid. Don't you think so?"

"I? I fear I'm only a man," the Poet confessed. "Sickness does not offer us such a variety of attractive maladies and toilets. One cannot be ill to advantage in a dressing-gown."

"O my!" Bella exclaimed with fervor. "You ought to see mamma's dressing-gown. It is a darling." Mrs. Dysart slipped quiet suppressive fingers over the girl's mouth.

"Now you are frightening Mr. Brandor," she said, with a flicker of her lashes. "If you talk like that, Bella, he will be looking at his watch." She tendered the frank full smile for an open topic. "This is your first visit to Spathorpe?"

"My very first."

"And you find Spathorpe interesting?"

"With only a little encouragement I could grow very fond of it."

"I dare not tell you how many years it is since I was first here. For charity's sake we will call it 'once upon a time.'"

"O my! I love 'once upon a time,'" says Bella. "Don't you?"

"But then, I was only a little girl. Indeed, I must have been, for I cannot remember in the least what I wore. That may be merciful."

"It was because of Uncle Dody we came to Spathorpe this time, wasn't it?" Bella interpolates. "O my! He was coming, too, and then he went away to America instead, and we don't know when he's coming back, do we? Perhaps not for ever such a long time."

Mrs. Dysart stroked the golden hair for a brief space with eyes introspectively fringed, as if her thought were suddenly directed inward.

"You funny girl!" she said, smiling in amusement on the upturned face. "Whatever has Uncle Dody to do with our coming here?"

Bella exclaims in surprise: "I thought he had. Hadn't he? O my! Why did we come?"

Mrs. Dysart answers: "That's what I asked myself too, when the doctor was sent for. Perhaps on purpose to make Mr. Brandor's acquaintance, Bella! Who knows?"

Their talk flows in a simple course that rises seldom above the level of Bella's comprehension. Where, occasionally, the Poet and Mrs. Dysart touch on topics beyond her, Bella listens with the reverence for an oracle, sobering her face to suitable attention, and silent as a mouse (for there is something very wonderful to her in things not understood, which seem to confirm the superiorities of those who deal in them), but she is not without skill to interpose the timely, though never interruptive, word, that turns the wandering tide of talk into more congenial channels. In this respect her manners are a model. Such proverbs as deal with

small children's shoulds and shouldn'ts, the auricular capacity of pitchers, and all those lines of conduct ruled with awful straightness and severity over the daily page of youth, were never made for Bella. Her ebullient little spirit, so naturally eager and impetuous, is wonderfully repressible. The merest touch of her mother's hand upon the golden head with which, as she talks, she toys, suffices to keep the impulsive word unspoken. And this with no sign of management or restraint, for the girl has that natural instinct which makes friends with discipline and melts authority into love.

To the Poet this picture of the mother and her daughter is a fascinating one, teaching him more of both than he could have learned from Bella's lips alone, and proving them more to each other than he had perhaps imagined. Affections unpractised are apt to betray themselves in public to the wary watcher. Before now the Poet—like most of us—has been witness of politic embraces; those artificial fondlings, like the kiss of flint and steel, that strive to make visible the spark of affection by force—an uncertain and incendiary flash when kindled. But this practised companionship of Bella and her mother reveals no guile; its quality is spontaneous.

And since there exists always the element of something sacred in the love between maternity and that it bore, the Poet sees Mrs. Dysart in a softer and diviner light by reason of these quiet caresses. The smiles she shows to him are mellowed by the deeper feeling discerned in her; something of the halo of the holy family irradiates this gracious woman and her child, and gives to their commingled beauty a significance of sanctity. Through Mrs. Dysart Bella is commended to him in a dearer degree; through Bella, Mrs. Dysart is ineffably translated, revealed by those soft instances for which

alone her daughter furnishes occasion. To sit beside this placid communion of the affections confers upon the Poet something of the soothing spirit of the noiseless running of a brook, whose waters, for all they flow, interpret tranquillity more than motion.

XXI

THE soft ruffle of the luncheon gong, that creeps discreetly in upon their conversation, brings the Poet to his feet with apologies for his disregard of time, but Mrs. Dysart begs him: "Surely, Mr. Brandor, you will not think of deserting us before lunch. It is a pleasure on which we have been counting," and Bella clasps her mother's knee with such appeal, saying: "Oh, mamma! He mustn't go. Don't let him go. He won't, I'm sure, if only you ask him," and adds such supplication to her mother's graciousness that the Poet has no alternative but to submit. The polite excuses he makes on the score of his own lunch already prepared, and Mrs. Herring's expectation of him, are met immediately by Bella, who runs to the balconied house with the speed of a fawn to messenger the Poet's absence, and comes back radiant with service and success, to take her place, still panting, at the table in the dining-room.

Here, drawn closer by the subtle friendly influences that emanate from white napery and spread silver and the glittering array of regulated glass, their intimacy grows. The room, lit by one large window, and softened by embroidered blinds, which the creeping sunlight already kindles, gives out upon the square, whose mid-day silence is broken only by rare footsteps and their own voices, or the laughter at intervals that comes to them cooled and clarified, like a trickle of iced water, from some adjacent window. Above Mrs. Dysart's head a convex mirror starts from the wall, as if it were

a silvery bubble, half-blown, about to detach itself and float upward. It reflects the sunlit window with magnified brightness, and the scarlet geraniums in the window boxes, and the heads of the sitters as they bend to meat or turn to share laughter, and the white surface of the luncheon table distorted to a dome, and the moving muslin of the serving-maid, and her sly uplifted eyes when she takes stock of the Poet by reflection. But they feed more on words than meats, and laughter is their wine. True, Bella is no mean plyer of the implements of the table, though as the girl herself explains, this luncheon constitutes her dinner, which she is allowed to take with Rupert and Mrs. Dysart instead of the Yorkshire pudding and roast beef with Leonie. Bella drinks lemonade, flavored with slices of the fruit, and sweetened frothily with sugar, and chilled with a miniature iceberg that bobs delectably against her nose in drinking, and makes the fluid so cold that it brings out beads upon the glass, and nips her breath and causes her to set the tumbler down in haste with an enraptured "Ah!" each time she drinks of it. It is so very good, she avers, that nothing will content her but her mother must confirm its goodness from her tumbler, which Mrs. Dysart does, to the extent of one indulgent sip that shows her lips and lowered lashes to advantage, saying: "O Bella! This is perfect piggy-wiggy. You are going to ruin Mr. Brandor's opinion of us."

Bella protests: "It isn't piggy-wiggy a bit. And Roo doesn't mind. I gave him half a chocolate yesterday, after I'd bitten it, for it was such a darling color inside, and the loveliest flavor. Wasn't it, Roo? Besides," says Bella, prosecuting the pros and cons of the subject with her industrious wont, "you always let me take a teeny sip of your whipped sherry in the morning. And that's not piggy-wiggy, is it? At least, I don't care if

it is. I love it. And it shows you love me, doesn't it? O my!"

If the lunch contributes not much to the store of their actual knowledge of each other, at least it augments that sympathetic wisdom which assimilates character by essence, without regard to its relation to an outer world, or the outer world's reaction on it. With Bella's tongue ringing such Arcadian music across the table, the spirit of candor—if not its substance—is loosed and prevails; and a belt of conceded friendship binds all three. Indeed, the amicable qualities cannot secrete themselves for long where Bella is. Her liberal and friendly nature seems to call all other natures to take hands with her and join the dancing ring of human happiness. Reserve, in such a circle, is quickly bereft of all that distinguishes it, like the curate in the kissing-ring, whose legs perforce must subscribe to the common measure however clear of it he hold his theology. Bella is the quickening force that animates the chain of current sympathies, and sings them on and sets the pace. So, though the Poet's bearing to Mrs. Dysart and Mrs. Dysart's disposition to the Poet, in their direct addresses to each other, infer the ceremony for new acquaintance, through Bella they short-circuit friendship. She is the ostensible conduit through which their laughter passes. In her their sympathies meet and mingle as if her little sociable heart were a parlor, and they, guests. Her presence serves to keep the conversation swift and sweet and friendly in its flow. No long words or convenances clog it. It runs like a brook, in a channel of simplicity, and its dimpled current is never so deep (or rarely) or so disturbed as to obscure the friendly nature of its bed. Once or twice the Poet catches the golden gleam in Mrs. Dysart's laughter for which Bella has prepared him, and agrees in heart with

Bella's dictum that the flaw becomes her, and would (if he had the willing of it) the gilded trophy should show oftener, for it marks the golden limit of Mrs. Dysart's smile, whose generosity is as great as Bella's, and whose quality mellow.

When Bella touches on the topic of ages, cracking the years in friendly calculation as if they were mere dessert nuts, Mrs. Dysart admonishes her daughter: "Teeth and ages, Bella, should never be discussed in company. For if you mention teeth, you stop half the smiles at table. And a woman is not more scared of a mouse than of her own age." But with a frankness which astonishes the Poet she admits to the age of thirty-two. He admires her candor, and such is the corruption of our human nature, that it sets him straightway wondering if she be no older than she pleads. Not that she looks her age, for the Poet but for Bella, would have judged her younger. And as Mrs. Dysart says: "One's daughters age one terribly, Mr. Brandor. The tragedy of married life is that a mother forfeits the privilege of deception."

He subtracts Bella's years from thirty-two, and concludes that Mrs. Dysart must have been married in her teens. The thought is romantic. The veil and orange blossom confer somewhat of the martyr's beauty to the visage of the youthful bride, that steps from the school-room to maternity like the figure of Faith betwixt fanatic fires and Heaven. In her early beauty—when her face thrilled a little under the conscious knowledge of it, weighted with the quality like a blossom under its first dews—Mrs. Dysart must have been a form to worship. And yet this thought, crossing the Poet's mind, does not aim to detract from his present admiration of her. Some women have their beauty on a slender and uncertain tenancy; others by lease; again

there are those who seem to hold their loveliness in fee simple, and pay no rent to Time. Of these, the Poet deems Mrs. Dysart to be one. He believes her beauty is the type that does not antique or fall into decay, but keeps pace with the years, changing visibly little, until it grow venerable like them. Some forms of beauty too, there are, that make no receptacle for experience, cannot contain the least substantial stuff of wisdom or experience, but fall at once to pieces like worthless furniture put to use. Knowledge only dulls them; suffering makes them fretful; pleasure, haggard. But Mrs. Dysart's face is one that treasures the riches of experience and shows them advantageously displayed behind a look of clear candor and yet reserve, like precious china seen through the panes of a cabinet. Bella's beauty, the Poet thinks, possesses this virtue, too. At her mother's age he fancies he can see her not dissimilar; her youth subdued, but not expelled; her eager lips modulated to an indulgent graciousness; her eyes deepened with the power of retrospect, and not, as now, the shallower mirrors of young joys and present sorrows.

The conclusion of their meal is marked by a sentimental change in Bella's face, who grows commiserative of a sudden with large eyes on Mrs. Dysart, and sighs: "O my!" and "Poor mamma!" explaining to the Poet: "Now mamma must go and rest. The doctor says so. Doesn't it seem sad? O my! I wish lunch were only just beginning."

But Mrs. Dysart shows less obedience than her own deep eye or little daughter would interpret her to have. She says: "Fiddle-de-dee, Bella. Patients are allowed to disobey the doctor when they're getting better. Mamma's not going to lie down yet. A little indiscretion will do her all the good in the world." And she proposes

fruit and coffee in the garden—if Mr. Brandor will be so kind as to overlook the shortcomings of the garden—as their neighbors do, daily. In such company the Poet is prepared to overlook anything, and conceives the sheltered quadrangle as a perfect Hesperides. So Mrs. Dysart throws over her shoulders a filmy stole, that veils her upper portions like a cloud, and imparts to her a transcendental look, as if her beauty might almost vaporize and float; and plucks a sunshade from the stand in the hall, and they pass into the garden, all three

Bella shows the Poet where the garden chairs are stored in the summer-house, and helps him to set them out, and Leonie—who bows to the Poet on Bella's breezy presentation with the inscrutable sly modesty of her race, slipping a decorous "M'sieu" through lips that close again immediately upon the word, as if she feared some fraction of her virtue might escape with it—Leonie brings wraps for her mistress, and a wicker table, and they take fruit and sip coffee in the shade cast by the south wall, and fill another hour with friendly talk. Floats to them as they sit the faint sound of the outer world, noises that lap against the walls of their retirement very solacefully, like summer waves that soothe a boat's prow, for, as Mrs. Dysart expresses it, "there is nothing so restful as other people's activity."

Passing voices and external laughter are wafted to them over the wall. They hear the footsteps of a re-animate Spathorpe, drawn forth anew by the necessity to show itself and publish its humors. Here and there in the high windows visible above them industrious heads are to be seen at toilet; hair is smoothed resolutely into order; feminine hats adjusted before the glass, with inconclusive touches, and side-glances at the street

for signs of how the public current flows. Shortly they hear faint paroxysms of music from the Parade; bars that burst out suddenly from the blue sky overhead, like colored stars from a rocket, and fade into nothing. The sacred concert is in progress; the terraces will be crowded with an ambiguous throng, irreducible to any exact standard of fashion, though chiefly of the class that goes to look for it. For Sunday music has not yet won its franchise, and whatever Conscience may believe, Fashion (which is after all the supreme thing in such matters) has not yet made up its mind whether to follow the lead of the nursemaid and soldier, or decide for orthodoxy and selecter pleasures. That portentous judge, Time, who takes as long to bring his causes to an issue as the Court of Chancery and whose rulings are as capricious as the Law, has since pronounced upon the question, but at this period of our Poet's history, it is still *sub judice*. There is said to be a monster petition hatching under the wings of the non-conformist conscience, alleged twenty feet long already, and growing with signatories at the rate of eighteen inches a day. Rumor speaks, too, of contemplated legal action on the part of the allied religious bodies, and there are hints of the exhumation of some moldering act to enforce public worship on all adults and baptized infants over the age of five years.

Meanwhile, there are many who will visit the Parade merely to witness and take a lesson from the wickedness of it, as English folk go to the gaming table at Monte Carlo, and hazard five francs to be assured of the iniquity of gambling. Some of cruder views, who see good in all things, go drawn by purely pious resolutions, to be improved by sacred music, and hear "The Lost Chord" blown five miles to sea out of a cornet. Others, who disapprove of pleasure on the Lord's Day,

and yet think it sin the day should be wasted, will promenade the cliff above the Parade gardens, where the music is to be heard without sacrifice of principle or collusion of pocket. The Esplanade is even more thronged than was the case this morning; but the countenance of the crowd shows a notable diminution of hauteur. These blasts of sacred music from below fire the latent festive spirit in humanity, that would break boisterously loose but for the day. Not Bibles hot with haste from Sunday school can altogether subdue the volatile essence of their owners that carry them. Links of giggling maidens as many as six abreast go waltzing up and down the roadway, that were less than fifteen minutes since in caps and aprons, perspiring with the zeal of hoisting hot joints to third-story lodgers, or rattling pots like castanets in the wash-up pancheon below stairs, and transported hence, some of them, with such expedition that they have hooked no more of their frock's fasteners than will serve to hold it on their shoulders, trusting, for the rest, to the blindness of humanity—which might stand them in good stead were these defects but virtues. There is a disposition to repartee, and cries that would breed and multiply freely in the congenial atmosphere of Saturday night, go cheviated down the Esplanade. All the iron seats are occupied to discomfort. There is no room for elbows to spread a newspaper. The railings are possessed by precocious youth. Artillerymen from the barracks, with white gloves stuffed under their shoulder-straps, and red-coated volunteers from the encampment on the Castle Hill lend color and a dash of recklessness to the crowd, swaggering martially from the hip, to the ring of spur-music, flicking switches and rifling all these feminine faces of their modesty, and making girls as giddy as the roundabouts. Sailors there are too, rolling

more leisurely in their capacious breeches, liberally tattooed about the wrist and forearm, and displaying necks as bare as a débutante. And frank rustics from the field, bringing the heaviness of the soil and the scent of byre and cowshed with them despite their Sunday clothes, push their way through the throng with the dropped underjaw indicative of wonder; finding a world of novelty in their fellow-men that will be retailed to-night in distant barns and sultry kitchens. For these the realm of fashion begins with walking-sticks and hard felt hats, on which basis Spathorpe on Sunday afternoon may be said to seethe with quality, and shows as many wonders to the curious watcher as cheese under the microscope.

To the garden occupants at Cromwell Lodge this stir of humanity is known only by its consequences on their own peace. All the distracting blood of life seems drawn away from their surroundings, as if the writhing excrescence on the cliff were a leech, with function to suck the fever out of Spathorpe's veins. The garden floats in sunlight deep and tranquil, immersed in the blue beauty of the cloudless sky. Around about them such half-drawn window blinds as they can see seem to flag like sleeping eyelids. The voice of the little fountain adds itself to the conversation. Somewhere, not far distant, but refined by the hot sunlight like gold in a crucible, the keys of a piano are struck, and the brief cool notes are soaked up instantly by the silence, as if they were drops of water in sand. A sense of Elysian peace touches everything, even their laughter. In such a mood and setting, people dally, each with reluctance to break the spell of communion, but Leonie has her orders and lacks the least compunction to obey them, arriving to the minute of Mrs. Dysart's command with a submissive "*S'il vous plaît, madame!*"

as if she studies her mistress' word more closely than her own convenience—which has indeed wished Mrs. Dysart at a number of different places for this hour past. Mrs. Dysart is not altogether indisposed to add a further term to the maid's probation, but she submits to the doctor and destiny with a becoming smile, and rises gracious from her wraps. "If only obedience would make us young, Mr. Brandor, how obedient we women would be!"

XXII

TO the thoughtful mind every fresh friendship constitutes, as it were, a pathway in destiny, that may lead somewhere, or nowhere, prove fateful or fruitless, broaden to a great high road or busy thoroughfare, or dwindle like the country lane that, despite the most heroic and stupendous repair, returns to the turf and elemental quagmire from which it was with labor raised; or reach at least by tangled ways the wilderness of thorn and brier and brackish pool, where countless paths efface themselves. Of such speculation the Poet is not altogether free, though light and pleasant laughter veils it. One who holds, as the Poet holds, that no chance smile noted, or passing face beheld, or voice heard, but is absorbed by the receptive spirit to form tissue for a soul, would be little likely to under-rate the influences of such a friendship as that of Bella and the beautiful woman whose daughter she is. Its potency seems all the stronger by reason of the half mystical semi-magic soil from whence it springs. A child's word spoken to him by chance encounter, and out of this he finds the whole fabric and firmament of his present life constituted; risen like a rainbow forth from nothing in a moment, and spanning his solitary heaven with friendly hues and bright companionship. In cities, amid a world of friendships, the faces of acquaintances tend to neutralize each other, but here in Spathorpe, where he is detached from human intimacies, and lives a life of almost spiritual suspension between realities and dreams, Mrs. Dysart and her

daughter loom to larger shape. All Spathorpe merges in these two identities, and takes its character from them; becomes but an incidental to this new friendship so informally begun.

The Poet muses on the curious fluctuations of life, and since feminine loveliness is ever a proper theme for inquiry, speculates who Mrs. Dysart may be. She is young. She is beautiful. She has the speech, the looks, the movements of a lady. Familiarity with the capitals of the world proves her a traveler. This house she occupies, the rings she winds upon her fingers, the gown she sits in, the daughter on whom she lavishes affection, declare her affluent. Yet her husband, he learns from Bella, is long since dead. She is a widow, therefore. Has this lonely state been never challenged? It seems incredible, all these years. Is loyalty to the memory of the dead begetter of her child the bar? Or a love of her own self-sovereignty? Or a languid disinclination to face again and undergo the vicissitudes of bonded life? In Mrs. Dysart's face, much though he may look at it, there shows no answer to his queried musings. And after all, the Poet is not made of that tenacious clay whose very speculations are earthen. The mysteries of life, he is aware, are too essential to its beauty to be ruthlessly torn aside wherever they impede or veil the light. His speculations rest no heavier on the object of them than the sunlight would. He leaves contentedly to time the solution that others might be led to seek by labor, and asks of Mrs. Dysart and her daughter no better than their beauty and their friendship give.

And since the preservation of an amicable *status quo* is impossible with such a kindling factor in affection as Bella's self, their triple friendship grows and grows apace. Within the week, imagination finds it difficult to

credit that but a handful of days before, this friendship lay unborn and unsuspected in the womb of Fate. Things that happen and are once yeaned in the world of fact, lose all their features of unlikelihood and grow domestic to the mind, like wildfowl bred in captivity. Life shows more familiar with this friendship than now it could look without it, so quickly does man's nature succumb to habit. If Mrs. Dysart and her daughter do not derive far back from the Poet's memory, they seem, at least, to have their fibers deep within his consciousness. To Bella, the Poet's origin seems already half fabulously lost in sentiment, like the beginnings of her own being. She fancies they have met before—though whether in a previous incarnation, as the Poet hazards, she is not sure—for all she really thinks the incarnation is her favorite flower. She believes they must have known and loved each other (for they do love each other, don't they! O my! Of course they do.) years and years ago—before they could remember. (And does he love mamma, too? Does he? What? Of course, she believes he does. How could anybody help? O my!) Perhaps—and the gloriousness of the possibility animates her like the sip of her mother's egg-sherry—perhaps they saw each other once upon a time; perhaps in London; perhaps before some shop window; perhaps in Regent Street, or Bond Street, or Oxford Street. Does he know those? He does? O my! She begins to be almost sure of it. And has been there lots of times? He has? O my, and so has she, too! It must be so. It shall be so.

"If we think so," says the Poet fervently, "It is so."

She cries: "Oh, let's think so as hard as we can! What if you should turn out to be a cousin, after all!"

The Poet devises better even than that, for by a

document drawn up one morning and attested by each of them at his writing table, and sealed with two great seals, bearing (as soon as the first anger is out of the wax) their respective thumb-prints, the Poet (of the one part, hereinafter called the Adoptor) takes Bella Dysart (of the second part, hereinafter called the Adoptee) for his true and lawful and well-beloved sister, with all the rights, titles, privileges and emoluments attached thereunto; nevertheless, forasmuch, *si quis, sine die, nisi prius*, and notwithstanding. After which the Poet has real scruples that the document—to be a proper legal instrument—should be witnessed in blood.

“Whose blood?” asks Bella.

“Ours,” says the Poet.

“Not *both* of ours!” she exclaims in alarm, and the Poet tells her: “Yes—both of ours.”

But though Bella says: “O my!” in a dismayed and awe-struck voice, more as if she were drawing the words in over her underlip than breathing them out; and then tenders a submissive sunburned wrist scribbled with pale blue veins that make the soft flesh throb like the bosom of a bird, how can he (carving knife in hand) wreak the strict requirement of the law upon so delicate and dear a tissue. Rather, he holds the emblem in his clasp and moralizes on it, thinks of all it illustrates and symbolizes and makes more beauteous, like Poetry’s self that lends sweetness to the facts of life, and draws the wandering rays of sentiment into one clear beam of splendid truth. Why, within the circle of this little wrist, thinks he, all womanhood is compassed; the precious qualities of warmth, of tenderness, submission, faith and courage and how many more, seem writ in it, part of the very substance of the flesh, incarnate and incorporate.

He closes his fingers tighter on this slender trophy that thumb and forefinger can span, and says, to test her: "You draw your breath. You are 'afraid."

She says: "Only a little—not very. And not when you hold me tight like that."

He says: "I know what you think. You think a brother dear at the price of a little blood."

She says: "Only a little! How much?"

"Half a pint," he tells her.

"O my!" And then she says, in a burst of loyalty and confidence: "Take as much as ever you like, Roo. Only let me turn my head, and please be quick. I know you won't hurt me."

She means it. She half believes this sacrifice of blood is being demanded of her; wholly trusts its executioner would work her no harm. She has the heart that burned in the bosoms of heroines when the world was young; when virtue aspired no higher than suffering, or souls beyond love; when to love was to be loyal, and loyalty yielded all, kissing with its dying breath what wounded it.

A poetic tenderness comes over him, a stirring of the chords of conscience as if the thing visioned were the thing done, and he the doer, and she the sufferer of it, beautified to sublimity. Were tyrants of old, he wonders, men of supreme poetic feeling, who spilled blood that they might luxuriate in pity and taste the blood-red vintage of remorse, like him of the ancients who was wont to toy with his mistress's neck, and save that she had but one, and that too dear for the experiment, thought what a throat were there to cut. They may have been. Voluptuaries of the soul, seeking to know all its gamut from deep hell to the topmost stars.

He lets go the little wrist and bethinks him that after all the law is not explicit on this point of blood. The

bond may serve as it stands. He quotes Aristotle in support of his belief, and refers Bella to the Justinian Code, and the Pipe Rolls, and Coke on Littleton, and Bella breathes relief, drawing fresh breath for the admiration of his learning. What a monument is here, that towers high above her like those inexplicable smoky statues in London, and knows the languages of the dead as well as the living, holding communion with poets whole centuries demised, and yet is flesh and blood and as accessible and free as air to the lungs. What a brother to have gained, bound tight to her by testament, and sacred seal! Henceforth the birthdays of each one must be observed (for so the contract runs), and piously Bella must commemorate Rupert's, and he hers. And henceforth she may arrange, by law and title, the papers on his desk, may brush his hat, pluck hairs off his coat, lay out his letters on the breakfast table, and open each envelope in his presence with precise and scrupulous care, the tip of her tongue keeping time with the conscientious motions of the paper-knife, visible now through her lips on this side, now the other—rip, rip, rip, rip!—may study (by right and title) the Poet's countenance as he reads, and guess at the names of his correspondents from their writing, spreading prohibitive fingers over the page and crying: "Stop! Don't read. Let me guess first of all who it is."

Well she knows, or comes to know, the black and bold and busy handwriting of Mr. Pendlip, the Poet's second—nay, his only—father; for the first and actual he scarcely knew. From him each alternate morning brings a letter, sometimes a portly oblong letter, fat and crinkling and gloriously expectant to the feel, as if it were stuffed and upholstered, a perfect bolster of a letter, filled (in addition to tidings of Daisy's health) with strange long documents and wondrous papers—

some of them that open out to newspaper dimension from as many as six foldings, and are as infested with figures as a baker's ceiling with flies. These the Poet calls balance sheets (not a bit like the sheets you sleep in. O my!) and reports, very loud reports, some of them, he says; though for the life of her can Bella hear anything. Mr. Pendlip, it is, she knows, who stewards all the Poet's substance, the lands and money that his father left him, a wondrous man of finance whose brain is a teeming bee-hive of busy figures, perpetually streaming to and from the financial pastures of the world, in lines as straight and certain as the multiplication table. She has the visual figure of this man of figures to a hair—his whiskers, tending to broaden the lower part of his face, and lend width to his large and purse-like mouth, big enough for benevolence and firm enough for business; his bushy eyebrows, drawn unitedly over his eyes in aiming a question, as if they formed the single visor of a cap; his pince-nez, striding the fleshy extremity of his nose awry, like a rider half out of his seat in the saddle; his great gold watch-chain with the early-Victorian seal, around which he winds his ample forefinger in deliberation; his deep voice, his sententious "Well, well's" and "I say no more's." News from the sick chamber that Mr. Pendlip's letters bring is brief and business-like. The man of affairs uses words with the scruple for figures, and would as soon be guilty of adding a nought to the value of them as a cipher to his pounds. He quotes temperatures like market-prices, and the course of suffering like fluctuations in stock, treating his daughter's sickness, on paper, with a fortitude equal to that he would display in a doubtful investment, inclining neither to optimism nor despair. Signs of assurance, however, are to be found in his admission of the first gravity of her

illness, which now replace his earlier hope for the best.

His letters breathe a sturdier spirit; finance re-exerts her influence over him. He analyzes the latest balance sheet of Bolchester and Hemeridge with brio, and thinks the company might have ventured a further five per cent. over the year without imprudence. Still, with every favor from fortune, it is out of the question for the patient to leave home before another fortnight. It may even be more. Whether the projected Spathorpe visit will yet be accomplished or not is all uncertain. Under these circumstances Rupert must exercise his own judgment on the point of remaining where he is. And there comes a postscript for Bella of more sweetness than chocolate. "Please, thank your little friend," writes the big financial fist, "for her kind messages of sympathy. They have been much appreciated."

Bella's lip even trembles with gratitude for this overwhelming reward of her solicitude. She is incredulous; can scarcely believe such a distinction hers. O my! Let her see the postscript; spell out for herself the momentous words. What does P. S. really mean? She's an awful dunce; she forgets everything. Does it mean *répondez s'il vous plaît*? No? She rather wishes it did. But Roo will let her write another message at the end of his next letter—won't he!—and tell her something very, very nice to say.

It is strange what slender ligaments bind the resolutions of mankind. So slight they are that men, and even Poets, do not always admit them. Between acts of the most tremendous consequences there lie, not seldom, connecting links of such frailty and attenuation as to be scarce discernible to Reason's microscopic eye. The Poet might have hesitated to confess to any but himself the true nature of his tie to Spathorpe. Except for Bella, and all her friendship signifies, he would be willing to

renounce the pleasures of this summer place and take leave without a pang. But now he feels it otherwise. There are some fine attachments first to be broken. He shrinks from those, the more because he recognizes their transitory character and hesitates to destroy qualities so fragile and so fair, as he would refrain from shortening by one single moment the colored magic of a bubble that ripens through splendor to its inevitable ruin. In his answer to Mr. Pendlip, however, there shows nothing of this; only those factual franknesses appropriate to the financial mind. How, for instance, that the Poet is as well for the present at Spathorpe as anywhere; that the bay is as beautiful as Naples; that the weather is glorious. All as true as true, and yet serving to show the gulf that flows between actual and spiritual truth; or perhaps, more accurately, to illustrate that Truth does not reside (as the vulgar imagine) in that hard and stony Fact which may be demonstrated conclusively and beyond dispute, like a pebble through a window-pane, but is as molecular as matter, and as infinitely divisible and elusive.

XXIII

IF Happiness (as that Other Poet tells us) was born a twin, it is not less true that by temperament he is a Tory. He shrinks from innovation like Dives from the death-duties. That that is, for him cannot be bettered. He is no reformer, like his ragged cousin Wretchedness, and at the last great balance and audit of the world, he will be found to have done little for its advancement, whatever he may have contributed to its stability.

Under happiness the Poet's days slide into a placid uniformity. Life's unruffled waters bear him on with scarce a sense of shock or motion; save for his wisdom he might be beguiled, as Bella almost is, into believing this deceptive current at a standstill. Each day is to the likeness of the one before; each day to come is looked to be like this. Through Bella the Poet penetrates into Spathorpe's intimate and childish bosom, frequents its cherished nooks and delectable quaint corners; through Mrs. Dysart he is drawn more favorably to the Spathorpe that his loneliness first avoided, and tastes, not against his liking, the idle pleasures of its Parade.

With Bella is there an inch of Spathorpe unexplored—one single of its sentiments untried? If looks left their traces visible where they rested, like thumbs, you should find all Spathorpe mottled over with them; the pages of its cherished purlieus as dog-eared as a popular volume from the lending library. Some of these

pages have been, since then, most ruthlessly torn out of the book of happiness that these two read together; more are threatened. Joys, too, like mortals, derive a deeper beauty from death, and by perishing become imperishable. Memory, as if she were a loving foster-mother, deals more tenderly with the orphaned offspring of Reality committed to her care, those sights and sounds bereft of the parentage that gave them birth and made dependents on her bounty. The nook demolished, the landmark gone, are dearer to memory than the things, though absent, whose own substance still preserves them; the joy beyond recall takes precedence in the bosom over the joys that are repeatable, and so susceptible of diminution.

Where are the little postilion chaises that used to whip up and down the Spathorpe hills in Bella's time?—little four-wheeled victorias no bigger than a bath-chair, that could accommodate a whole family of three generations during the busy season; with a bobbing jack-booted jockey on the pony's back, brilliant in all the colors known or unknown to the racing world. Gone even in these brief years, like the link-boys and sedan-chair men, and barking night-watchmen; extinct and unlamented as the dodo. Where, too, is the Hillborough Bar, that stubborn thing of stone that lent its pseudo-medixval frown to the steep High Street, and throttled traffic; under whose reverberating arch, when free, the reckless fish-carts, dripping ice water and fish scales, thundered down the hill amid the mighty rattle of their harness, like a giant courrant in chain-mail? And then that venerated page of ancient Spathorpe at the foot of the Castle Hill—how ruthless progress has destroyed it. Those narrow passage-ways overhung with timbered gables, crooked as lightning, and thronged with smells; where melancholy haddocks, that seem to have lost all.

interest in life, lie shriveling in the sun, and cats, surfeited with sea fare, sleep by them without heed; and fishwives thrust their red elbows out of little upper windows and talk to each other across the three feet of interspace in unfamiliar briny tongues; and seated fishermen mend brown nets on the wooden balconies that mount sheer above each other, tier by tier, to where at last they touch the sky.

And the dim marine stores, that are to ocean what those ancient musty leather-smelling commentaries are to the Scriptures, through whose cobwebby windows is to be seen the most romantic lumber: harpoons and brass-capped telescopes, and oil-skins and fishing tackle, and great tallow-sweating sea boots, themselves as big as porpoises, and port and starboard lights, and compasses and charts in such profusion that stand how long you will, and look how hard you may, there is always some fresh and rich discovery for the finger to point at, some strange object not noted before, to strike the mind with new images of the wonder and profundity of the sea. And then the noisy boatyards, ringing with the hammer, and the ship's carpenters wading about their work knee-deep in a surf of shavings, and the fishcurers wrapped in an acrid reek of smoke, and the great bellied cauldrons of Stockholm tar bubbling over their wood fires that look deceptively extinguished in the sun, and can hardly be realized alight save by the violent ripples of the chain and tripod legs above them, and the fierce thin wisps of heat that curl over the cauldron's side from time to time and lick out at the spectators like a hot, far-reaching tongue.

And those wondrous ancient public houses, no bigger than lobster pots, lurking in cut-throat corners, under beetling eaves and crushed and sunken roofs, into which the booted seamen roll, while Bella clasps the Poet's

arm to make sure of him. Where she and the Poet wandered around these nooks and byways, the finger of change has made many erasures. No concrete sea-drive then girdled the Castle cliff, that pushed its uncurbed promontory into ocean, and held the two bays rigorously sundered, nor had the hand of man scarped back the headland's overhung and menacing brow. It crumbled periodically with a roar of thunder, sending up dense clouds of smoke to heaven, and hurling its topmost crags like defiances into the boiling sea below. Where Bella and the Poet scrambled out upon the weedy foot-rocks that scorching afternoon, amid the fiery hotness of great stones and the odor of drying wrack and brine, and the cry of circling sea-birds, and the splash and suck and fret of waves, and made the glorious passage from south to north, no sweeping carriage roadway ran. That sea-resisting mile of sleek and solid masonry was yet but a vision or the germ of one; a tiny fitful spark in the hidden stuff of Spathorpe's aspiration, smoldering into brightness when breathed on now and then. Nature was still god-mother to the north bay, and could be found by those who sought her. Her brows were not then smoothed with grassplots, and plaited with pathways. No glassy shelters glittered on her, nor band-stand shone, nor geometric flower beds feuded hotly with the sun. Art was represented only by a spectral pier, that stretched out to sea on iron pillars, crusted white with limpets and draped with dank green weed below the tide mark.

At its end was a pavilion for the supply of lemonade and gaseous refreshments, and a weighing machine and camera obscura. Sometimes music might be heard there, damped by its watery surroundings and the small number of hands to applaud; or a professor of natation would divest himself of an ulster and plunge into

the sea from a wooden stage in a striped bathing suit with silver medals and Maltese crosses on his chest, and heads would corrugate the parapet alternately on this side and on that, to watch him while he dived and swam.

But already the day of piers was passing; bereaved of popularity the Spathorpe pier lived in a state of quiet widowhood apart, unfrequented by many friends. Chiefly her weeds lent midday shade to parents who sat under her floorboards while their barefooted progeny played; or gave grateful shelter to trippers, huddled disconsolately beneath her girders when it rained. Whereat the solitary photographer ran, too, with the camera under his arm, its head muffled up in black velvet as if mourning a death in the family, to take refuge and canvass custom, and so—if possible—turn rain to sunlight, slashing the drops off his glistening hat with one hand, and insinuating the gilt-framed samples of his skill with the other, and calling this the proper light for portraiture, and adding by his presence and solicitude another element to the discomforts of the situation, while the raindrops washed humanity off the sands like flies off a window-pane, leaving only the bathing vans and the melancholy ring of asses, head to head, whose lot no storms can make more hard nor sunlight brighten, brooding sadly over the wrongs of their race. The bare-skinned donkey-boy—whose family arms should be a cudgel rampant quartered on an ass-skin semé with bruises—pulls two of their company together by the bridle and takes a crouching shelter under their bellies.

Bella knows these donkeys, these persecuted Hebrews of the animal world—though less than their more favored kindred of the south side—and loves and pities them for their mournful patient eyes and sad long ears.

And knows their names, asking the donkey-boy if he is good to them, which, to the peril of his swarthy soul, he says he is.

Did not Bella and the Poet ride to Colbeck Mill along the sands that very afternoon when they had scrambled over the rocks of the headland? In truth they did, Bella mounted on no less a personage than Queen Elizabeth, and the Poet astride of the Duke of Wellington, with the ragged donkey-boy behind them, whose toilet consisted in the main of sunburn, supplemented by half a shirt that showed in the most unexpected places, two buttons and a piece of knotted string with which the whole fabric of convention appeared suspended, shaking to the verge of disruption when he ran. He was under the strictest order to use no cudgel, and did not, but the mere weight of his shadow on their flanks was stimulus enough to his steeds, that wasted no time in converting energy into motion, but broke into a nimble trot that shook their riders like quaking custards, and made Bella scream between exhilaration and alarm, after the fashion of all the rest of her sex that they met or overtook upon the way.

And at the Mill, which is the beaming whitewashed house that stands at the Beck mouth half across the bay—a working mill no longer, but a place of pilgrimage for arid donkeys and buffeted riders—they drank tea and ate Colbeck cake at one of the many mug-worn tables under the blue sky, in open sunlight—beautiful lukewarm tea with a rich Britannia metal taste about it, and exquisite Colbeck cakes crammed with currants, and succulent with melted sugar. Their donkey-boy lay on his stomach on the parched grass hard by, with his bare legs in the air, and drank tea, too, out of a thick pint mug, both his hands clasped

about its circumference, sucking up the fluid with noisy satisfaction like a quadruped, and lent infinite variety to Colbeck cake by his manner of eating it—now thrusting it into his mouth corner-wise, and regarding the resultant fracture as if it were a phenomenon, now detaching the upper crust to feast his eyes on the syrupy blackness within, or picking a currant or two by hand; anon clapping on the pasty lid and rolling on his back to hold the sweetmeat overhead against the sky, with the sunlight on it, like a mother with her babe, or a cat playing with a mouse, his appetite compounded half of love and half ferocity; from time to time clutching his cudgel with barbaric instinct and leveling a fierce blow at the sparse herb as if it had been the irresistible worn hide of an ass.

Nor were Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Wellington neglected, for they fared on Colbeck cake and lumps of sugar at Bella's hands, which they enjoyed after their manner, sadly and with resignation, drawing by degrees so close to the bestower of this bounty that to all intents and purposes the company at table was four, and Bella could not lift the teacup to her lips but a soft intrusive muzzle blew upon it. All this, and the clear sky, and the tranquilizing sound of the sea, and the purling of the Beck, and the ring of teaspoons against cups and saucers, and the sight of these many other humans seated happily, some at long tables and some at round, and some before collations spread on newspapers on the grass, and the spirit of friendship habiting even lukewarm tea, drew Bella's soul into her eyes, and made them very large and limpid, as though all this happiness were so much pain. She could but heave a sigh from the bottom of her heart, and take the Poet's hands in hers, and look at him as if he were

the scenery itself and say: "O my!" To which, when the Poet asked her, "O my, what?" she added: "O my! I don't know what. I think everything."

But present happiness never caused Bella to forget her absent friends, but rather—as in the virtuous it ought to do—it strengthened her affection for them. So they bought ever such a bagful of Colbeck cake, and a great stick of Spathorpe rock for the donkey-boy to suck on his way home, and so make up for the disuse of his cudgel. And with that they would have been gone, but their mounting was not quick enough to elude the vigilance of the resident photographer, who suddenly bore down upon them from an embankment on the other side of which he had been busy preying on picnickers, with the cry: "One moment, gentleman. One moment, sir. The pick of the daylight. I am at your service now, sir. Just half a minute before you go. There shall be no waiting, I promise you. We are all ready to begin. No delay—no pain. A trifle more to the left, sir, to get the sunlight on the young lady's face. Out of the way, boy, do you want to throw the camera over? Don't move, sir. Hold the donkey's nose up, miss. There! We can't beat that. One—two—What did I tell you, sir!"

Nor did the resident photographer's motions lag behind his voice. He chasséd with his camera right and left, as if she were a lady; waltzed and reversed, with an astonishing facility and grace, whipping his partner's legs off the ground and wheeling her slender extremities in the most aërial circles. No one would have suspected, at first sight, the latent grace of movement within him, for, speaking superficially and at random, he did not look a lady's man. He seemed rather, one might say, a man addicted to deep thinking; a drainer of philosophy; one in the habit of employing the glass

of speculation upon the world, to view life through the lens of it. An enthusiast and master of the craft his acts proclaimed him. At whatever cost to its permanency the picture was produced, dripping wet first of all, and showed magically to the subjects of it against the dark interior of the photographer's hat; next moment as dry as a cobbler's throat, with a backing of varnish, clipped within a gilt-foil frame, and embedded in a papier-maché case. And that to his other attainments the artist added a profound knowledge of human nature was evidenced by his reply to the Poet's inquiry in respect to remuneration, for he said, rubbing his acid-stained hands: "My price is a shilling, sir. But we shall not quarrel about that, sir. I leave it to you, sir. I trust I know a gentleman and a soldier when I see one. I wasn't trained in a high-class studio for nothing. Thank you, sir. Thank you, captain. All good luck to you and the young lady."

Time, however he may have dealt with this agile artificer of features, has certainly been indulgent (despite the haste bestowed upon it) to the gilt-edged daguerreotype in its papier-maché frame. It shows us the writer of "Mnemosyne's Daughters" and those larger, deeper volumes that succeeded, seated like Silenus on an ass, moved to mirth. His dangling legs have almost purchase enough to propel the animal he sits on after the fashion of a velocipede. The face, broadened with laughter, looks very round and boyish. Bella is more grave. Her eyes are plainly fixed upon the camera in a gaze of interest and curiosity. She takes the occasion very solemnly. Her straw hat, never reclaimed since the pancake-tossing on the donkey's back, lies at the back of her hair, and makes a nimbus for her head. Also she has lent herself to reproduction without those little touches of adjustment usual in more

studied portraiture, and the confession of faith of her lower attributes is as liberal as St. Athanasius' Creed. The round mark at the lower left-hand corner of the picture, like a cocoanut, is the shadow of the donkey-boy's head. In the background rises the indistinct white gable of the Mill, and some hazy figures out of the focus of the camera, that encircle the blurred dimensions of a wagonette.

XXIV

WITH the entrance of Mrs. Dysart into the Poet's life, his day assumes three phases: the first phase ruled by Bella's self, the second phase where Mrs. Dysart and her daughter both take equal share, the third phase that in which the elder partner reigns. And if we are to count those other moments, daily more rare, wherein the Poet enjoys the spacious firmament of his own solitude, we may add a fourth. But it is not a phase on which, at present, we need to dwell.

Bella is, of course, the empress absolute of his time, commanding it how she wills. From the early hours he belongs to her; she takes her sisterhood very seriously; goes to meet him coming from his bathe before breakfast with the twisted towel around his neck, fresh as a new-boiled lobster, and sighs she cannot share with him this early joy. But Spathorpe countenances no foamy mixture of the sexes; its waves ruthlessly divorce husband from wife like a High Court decree, and Mrs. Dysart is not of the train of Venus Anadyomene—still less Leonie, who protests, at Bella's mere suggestion: "*Ma foi! Oh, la, la! A-t-on jamais vu! I am not a dolphin, moi!* If you have envy to swim, take Madame Herring with you." So Bella must remain a paddler, though dearly she would love to make friends with the blue waves and flash her arms out of the water as she has seen the Poet do, and churn as he does a wake of noisy foam with his feet, and learn from him the secrets of natation in a darling bathing-costume (she thinks)

of navy blue, with a sailor collar and a cockle-shell cap; and a white cord girdle, and white—or perhaps Cambridge blue—braiding to the trouserettes and tunic, like the full-page picture in the double summer number of *The Frock*.

Breakfast over—which is, both with Bella and the Poet, no sluggard meal—they put to profit without delay the two hours or more which will elapse before Mrs. Dysart shows her morning's toilet to the sun.

Perhaps they wander over the Parade, while the fresh morning air, not yet chased out of refuge by the sun's rays, shelters cool-cheeked beneath the trees, in those tunneled leafy walks that lead down by steep diagonals to the sea-wall; and the terraces are spaciouly empty, and the colonnade a playing-ground for echoes, resounding to their footsteps, and prolongating the idle whistlings of programme boys and Parade attendants; and the young lady is sweeping the most cherub clouds of dust over the threshold of the confectionery shop. She leaves her brush and retires at sight of Bella and the Poet, being seen watching for them from behind the counter as they go by. And the other shops in the shady cloistered arcade are opening their shutters. The newsboy lays out his papers. The florist's siren with the bedstraw hair freshens up her stock for the day with a watering-pot, sprinkling dew on yester-morning's blooms, and making ready to be as sweet as a buttonhole to gentlemen customers when they come. The bilious-looking gentleman with puffy eyelids and coal black hair, and flesh too sleek to be altogether trustworthy by our insular standards—who will, before the morning's company arrives, assume a red fez cap with a black tassel—is dusting his rows of Birmingham beads in the Oriental Bazaar, that diffuses a heavy odor of woods and perfumed wares and

languid Eastern vices. Madame Crypto's door will be locked as yet, for hers is a later and more leisured clientèle. The great reader of destinies needs only to forestall the band by a minute or two, when she will sweep rapidly to her studio veiled, like the destinies she deals in; so powerfully scented that the waft of her is almost as corporeal as her proper person. One quick turn of the latch-key, drawn from her mysterious reticule and deftly applied, and forthwith she disappears through the doorway and becomes for the rest of the morning an enigma—a perfumed presence, in which human origin is almost lost, secluded behind Japanese screens and shimmering bead curtains, poring over palms and changing money with clairvoyant precision. Spathorpe has half a dozen of such mystics: palmists and horoscope casters, and the more humble phrenologists, whose advertisements are borne about the streets sandwiched over the shoulders of broken humanity in white smocks and doctors' caps and boots more legible to read than any palms, whose boards display outstretched hands intersected in every direction with railway systems of destinies, or the human head magnified and mapped out like allotment gardens into a crowded area of passions.

From the Parade, Bella and the Poet extemporize lightly over the keyboard of the day, touching a note here or a chord there, to thrill their appetite for the glorious music potential in it. They dip down onto the beach to meet the tide of life that creeps slowly over and obscures it from the foreshore: the photographers with arched backs, pushing their crazy dark-rooms on wheels through the heavy sand; fruit-sellers burdened on both arms with creaking baskets; the vendor of balloons, all blown big and streaming aërially from his rude hand-cart, to the four corners of which are affixed

paper windmills, spinning in the breeze created by his movement, or flagging when he stops at the hail of some breathless purchaser; the ice-cream stalls, resplendent with paint and polished brass, tugged by toiling Italians, or donkey-drawn; the Punch and Judy professor with the fleshy nose that looks as if it had been in steep all night, bearing the theater on his back, its petticoats rolled up to the hips for ease of handling, followed by a hard-faced disillusioned wife hunching her left shoulder under the strap of the property box with a dirty gum-eyed Toby at her careworn skirts; and the sand artist, with bare feet and upturned trousers, carrying the implements of his calling wrapped in discolored calico, who will appropriate a plot of beach some twenty feet by fifteen, and thereon grave the picture of a castle, or any other object lending itself to treatment by rectangles and straight lines, and will lay his cap at the corner, lining uppermost, with three coppers and a sixpence in it, and sit cross-legged in its close vicinity thereafter, defying sunstroke till flooded by the tide.

By this time the veins and arteries of Spathorpe are throbbing fast, and life pulses toward the Parade. All the most attractive frocks and pretty ankles flit in the direction of its turnstiles. The shadowed colonnade, where the programme-boys clinked coppers for occupation and whistled for company when first Bella and the Poet passed by, is thronged with serious pleasure-seekers. Scarcely a seat in shelter but already is appropriated; the band pavilion rises out of an unbroken parterre of sunshades; over the steps of the terraces life drips in color like an illuminated cascade. One by one the notabilities arrive—those familiar figures whose presence works like leaven in this mass of life, and lifts and lightens it. The Powder Monkey, true child of the

Parade, in fancy costume—who has been fifteen ever since she was ten—with flaxen hair and the most delicately penciled brows that can be produced with a steady hand and a burned almond, and bold black calves like inverted champagne quarts squeezed into tiny tan shoes of the size that pinched her two years ago. It is an open secret that she paints; indeed, she would fail of her object if you did not think so. Women paint to put back the hands of time; the Powder Monkey paints to set them forward. Wherever she goes (she knows all the seats for two, and has sat in them) Eton collars and adolescent moustaches lurk furtively in the train of her skirts and the sound of her pettish footplants. She is so ubiquitous upon the Parade, and met with at so many corners, you might be sworn she had a sister. Her device is a Breton cap, with a crimson tassel that coquettes with her left ear as she walks; her arms, legs, sable, razed and rampant; her motto, *Carpe diem*.

And here comes the Admiral, with his telescope under his arm to pace the main terrace like a quarter-deck and offer his eye-piece to the unwary, enlisting them in a conversation the length of which depends alone upon their courtesy or endurance. He creeps upon strangers as insidiously as a seasickness; is at their elbow before they are aware of him; cannot be staved off; has all the states of the tide, trawling movements, last night's temperatures, rainfalls and sun-registers, and by all but naval men might be thought one of them. For fault of company he will talk to himself, and indeed comes and goes with a shaking of his head as if he answered objections or weighed opinions. It is said he has out-talked two wives and all his friends, and is dependent now on the charity or ignorance of strangers—being rarely seen in conversation twice with the same individual. And here are the Siamese Twins,

who put their identities together as spinsters join their savings, to make the most of them; reinforcing every point of similarity and drawing recognition from a common stock. They walk with the same step, wear the same materials, show the same crease down the trousers' leg, swing the same walking-stick, display the same cuff with the same handkerchief thrust in it, and spurn mixed company that may tend to impair the force of their resemblance by fortuitous division.

And here—who does not know him?—struts the Baron, under his silk hat with the wide brim that rakes his brow sideways like some piratical craft, exemplifying in him the best traditions of the worst school of French roués. His blue-black moustache strikes off at either extremity to a couple of meat-skewers with the grease still on them, whose jaunty points he touches—with a care for his gloves—when he comes in sight of Beauty. Day by day he prosecutes the Parade; distributes his smiles assiduously amongst the Sex as if they were circulars; smokes cigars with a long ash that he extends from him airily in the cleft of two fingers, tankidded; and is scented like a valentine. In fine, he is inevitable to the Parade, and it is as much the fashion to cultivate a speaking acquaintance with the Baron as it is to take the waters at Harrogate. Rumor tells as many reports of him as she is feigned to have tongues. By familiars, who know him the least, he is hailed “Monshure,” and it is certain he can bow in French and say “wee-wee.” From time to time he may be seen exchanging gallantries with the Powder Monkey, applying whispers to her ear as if they were tic-drops; but he is more often in the company of his own sex; youths principally, who spin walking-sticks to the danger of the Parade, and converge attentive heads to the Baron's perfumed disclosures.

Here come, too, the bandsmen in solemn black, with top hats made rusty by the sea and sun, and trousers elbowed with much sitting, who mount the kiosk without external joy, like the members of a coroner's jury. The double bass is unheard from his funereal wrappings; the kettle-drums are tapped and tuned; one by one the oboe and the clarinet, the plaintive flute and snoring bassoon fill the band-stand with menagerie noises that draw marveling childhood up the steps to hook its nose upon the wooden wicket.

AT eleven o'clock, or very little later, comes the portly figure of Herr Toots across the sun space of the band square, to the sound of desultory applause and takes his seat on the high-cushioned stool with a bow as subdued as the greeting. The peremptory rap of his baton on the desk subjugates at length these wild-beast noises—though they betray half a disposition to contest his rule. Its imperious beat imposes time upon the day. With the first ebullient splash of music that foams over the band-stand like champagne over the bottle neck, intoxicating the sunlight, the Spathorpe day begins. The Parade wakens instantaneously to life and movement. Folly, in this effervescent element of music, disports itself like wit in wine; costumes vie audaciously with each other for supremacy as if they were *bon mots* across the goblet. While the music lasts, during these two hours of self-display, the Parade is a world of its own, governed by its own laws, subject to nothing but its own decrees. In this secluded life of the Parade, where things must be mainly judged according to pretensions, there are rewards and prizes corresponding to those obtainable in the outer world, and so long as the band is here to play, and there is this shifting company held together in bond of community by mutual ignorance of one another, they have a value which encourages competition and imposture. Mortals who can command no reputation in the larger world by wit may flourish here on the lack of it, and acquire a sort of bastard

fame by any folly sufficiently accentuated to be made familiar. For since in this world publicity is misconceived for greatness, and more worshiped; and the popularity of a face is accepted for token of a mind's merit, it follows that all who can succeed in foisting their features on the notice of the Parade, enjoy a spurious celebrity and are lifted above the common height on the glances of their kind. For such is the attraction of publicity over the human mind that those who cannot win it for themselves will run after it in others, and no degree of the quality is so adulterate and despicable but seems worthy of pursuit by some. The very niggers that rap their banjoes and crack their cleavers beneath the concave sea-wall of the Parade for ha'pence or what you will, have their retinue of admirers to pluck at the skirts of their publicity and seek the gratification of a share in it. As for those mysterious individuals in the sombrero hats and multifold cloaks and smoked glasses who make music below the balconies of the Esplanade and in the better quarters of the town, and suffer it to be suspected they are noblemen in disguise—so that threepence in silver seems the smallest offering self-respect may drop into their cockle-shell—they hold, for this season at least, a perfect court around the precincts of the piano when their afternoon session is over, and have the choice of as many infatuated fingers as they care to squeeze.

Most of their glamor leaves them at a later epoch along with him who sang the tenor lyrics to the first floors, in a strangulated voice as if the organ were wrapped in a wet compress. And even before their treasurer's defection the nimbus of mystery over these musicians' brows was already half erased. They had begun to walk abroad without their cloaks, and there was not enough mystery about their trousers' knees to

sustain illusion and keep alive the speculative spirit; and they discarded their smoked glasses and showed their eyes like ordinary men, and the moment the world saw who they really were, it tired of them. For to earn the recognition of Spathorpe—and of the Parade, intensely—one must be known, or not at all. If you bring a fame already manufactured, it will pass current here, and you shall receive much worship. But if you have not this, then you were best to begin at the foot of the ladder, bekown of none, for the world is prepared to worship two things—the second, and chiefest, being what it does not understand. For which reason it is seldom that any Spathorpe-made reputation survives a second season. So long as it keep clear of contact with hard realities it may soar above the heads like a soap-bubble, but if it once touch ground of fact, it bursts. Much the same qualities gain with the Parade as win the outer world. Moderation is fatal; the prize goes to the importunate rather than the deserving on the principle that one gives alms to obstinate mendicancy—to be rid of it. Beauty is, of course, her own advocate. She speaks most languages, like money, and needs no herald. If you have not beauty, and your coat-of-arms is blazoned with no public or acknowledged merit, then you must needs have recourse to effrontery or folly; outstrip the fashion, or cultivate a style. In follies, as in talents, plurality is no advantage. Rather reiterate one, of whichever kind, than confuse with many. Teach the Parade to know you, as the bird fancier teaches tunes to a bullfinch, by endless repetition. If your forte be melancholy, be melancholy all the while. If you aspire to reach fame through your clothes, look that you do not change these too recklessly, for fear identity be lost. Remember, too, the calls on Spathorpe's notice. The Parade is a hive of buzzing rivalries. Avoid complexity, that tends to

split its mass and so disperse itself. Let your note be plain and peremptory that can carry from one end of the Parade to the other, and be distinguished as far away as the bridge turnstile. With such instructions—and the natural aids that impudence may lend you—you may aspire in a week to be one of the pillars of the Parade; to constitute yourself as much a part of the fabric of its life to the life that watches, as the bandstand or view-tower, or the blue sea that brims up to its walls.

XXVI

AND though, perhaps, the Parade is more a vantage ground for satire than for poesy, the Poet succumbs in company to its infection, and catches some measure of the sweet disease endemic within its walls. No pleasure, not altogether base, but has, when arraigned, an argument for its existence. If life run shallow here—and in the hierarchy of moods the prattling of the brook has its place and moment no less than the deep-hearted river, or the fathomless sea—it flows to pretty music, and the very clearness of its current, purling so glassily over human foibles and magnifying and caressing them with its ripples, seems to cleanse folly like a child's face, and show it too transparent to be vile. Each morning, after those earlier rambles, the Poet is to be found upon the Parade with Mrs. Dysart and her daughter, and Spathorpe learns the hour to look for them. Somewhere about the fourth number on the band-stand, they may be seen coming into sunlight down the broad steps of the Italian Terrace; and once during the morning, rarely more, the three will make the circuit of the Promenade.

Mostly they are unobtrusive sitters apart, spectators of the pageant from the terrace, looking down upon its motions out of this detached companionship, like the occupants of a box at a masquerade. Mrs. Dysart subscribes to the fictions of the place in so far as to come provided with a book, which the Poet carries, but its pages are seldom opened save by the breeze, or

when Bella's fingers ruffle them. To the sound of the tinkling band and the sight of the outspread bay, and the ceaseless movements of the promenaders at their feet, they sit and talk and make common fund of laughter.

And yet, if they seem to take no part in the life they look at, they form, of the life itself, no inconsiderable feature, and are noted by many more than they note. Even their aloofness constitutes a sort of eminence that renders them the more conspicuous when seen, and, besides, such beauty as Mrs. Dysart has, needs a better bushel than mere retirements for its effective hiding. Her gowns alone command attention; there are none quite such upon the Parade, and well they repay the surreptitious visits from aspiring students of style, who make it in their way to traverse the terrace where she sits, for a closer sight of them. And if it be, as some of her gender assert, they are too elegant for the Parade, this is a contention for women rather than men. The view of the wearer's self, as expressed to her daughter, and by her daughter transmitted to the Poet, is to the effect that "I think your mamma must discontinue the Parade, Bella, and be an invalid again. It is so much simpler and economical. She has nothing in the world to wear."

By the third day, this beautiful woman with her fascinating daughter, and the slender smooth-skinned boy who is obviously neither son nor husband, live in the beams of Spathorpe's eye. Their comings and their goings are as much noted as the weather. If for a reason—though the reason is rare—they fail to keep their public tryst upon the terrace, the Parade feels the absence of them, and there are many to wonder where they are, and why. In time, and that but a short matter of days, they come to typify the Parade, to stand a sort

of emblem for this composite summer life that quickens Spathorpe's veins each season with new blood more vital than its own. The Poet's name, though on fame's threshold as himself on manhood's, acquires a local luster. His volumes are shown on a glass shelf at the fashionable bookseller's in Margaret Street, where the perfumed stationery is, under a special label; and at the Castle Library in Hillborough; and Bella has to be trained not to pluck his sleeve when they pass by, or exclaim: "See! There they are again. O my! I believe one of them's gone. Don't they look lovely!" and copies find their way upon the Parade to the Poet's embarrassment and Bella's delight, who loves to count them and act gatekeeper to the Poet's glory.

Now and again mysterious paper parcels are left for the Poet at his rooms, that, being undone, declare themselves autograph albums long inspired with a secret passion for his name. The faintly scented missive with which they are accompanied is too scrupulously penned and punctuated to be extempore, and is, in all probability, the last of a tragic family of half a dozen—all come to a violent end but this. Two or three aspirants to his favor prosecute their plea in person. They are flushed and desperate—for though he does not know, the assault has been maintained a whole morning without success, and this is its last sally. It attacks him in the rear, for frustrated purpose dares no longer to essay his eye. He hears his own name, very breathless, as if it had been running after him a mile or more, and turns to discover an album palpitating in the vicinity of his waistcoat. Apology and petition are so eager and hopelessly involved that they impede each other like the joint contestants in a three-legged race. But their purpose is divined, the smile rendered, the name inscribed. From the petitioner's point of view the episode is a failure.

Too late she recovers composure to realize a gorgeous opportunity lost, the questions unasked, the tributes she had not breath to pay. She retires hot with speculation as to what the Poet must think of her—and would be consoled little to learn that he does not think of her at all—but at least she has the fruit of her daring, that makes up to pride what it has lost in self-possession, and she goes back to read “Mnemosyne’s Daughters,” while the memory of the Poet’s smile intoxicates her. All which serves to indicate his fame.

The picture postcard lies yet—at this date—beneath a heap of innovations in the lap of Fortune, unbestowed, so this phase of glory is denied. Views of Spathorpe are still sold in albums that extend like concertinas when opened, and smell of varnish; or in photographs mounted on glass, with beveled plush frames; or in sheets of notepaper headed with formal engravings of the Castle and Parade—these latter generally depicting a Spathorpe long anterior to Bella’s time, when the pier was but a jetty, and the Parade of wood; and the ladies shown in the postilion chaises wore skirts like the half-inflated balloon that Bella has seen at the Crystal Palace; so monstrous that the whole chaise is smothered under flounces, and the postilion is pictured with his fingers to his head in perplexity as to his own bestowal. But if the picture postcard is unavailable as a vehicle for fame, and this great continent of popularity still lacks its Columbus, the Poet’s face is honorably displayed as a photograph at one shilling, in company with divines in lawn sleeves, and politicians, and stage beauties—whose portraits prove that teeth preceded the picture postcard, and the dental smile was probably known, in some form or other, to the ancients.

Of the Poet’s fame, too, and Mrs. Dysart’s beauty, we have further illustration; for the honor of a sitting

from each is solicited in the most courtly letters, punctiliously varied, by the great Sonoro, whose photographic galleries are equipped at this period of his heyday with portraitists and retouchers and miniature painters brought down from London during the season to cope with the daily crowd of fashion which streams noiselessly over the luxurious three-pile carpets, and makes a subdued bee-hive hubbub in the spacious reception-rooms, and is reduced and enlarged and vignettied and sepia-ed and enameled and crayoned and water-colored and oiled in every pose known to the camera. To be portrayed by Sonoro is a social necessity; to be displayed in his show case as much an aspiration here as to be presented at court. Not a bosom that rises and falls beneath his posing but throbs with ambition to be admitted to the drawing-room of his elect; and it is even said that gold in certain cases forms the basis of admission to his frames—which is the more credible since this basis is by no means always beauty—while rumor has it that more than one eligible daughter has been married direct from Sonoro's show case.

Conceive then the fame that can reach this much-sought man in the fastness of his studio, and make him solicit who is more used to be solicited, conceding sittings with almost the condescension for favors, as if each one of the hundreds granted came from the margin of a clemency already overtaxed. Fame like this is fame indeed. Mrs. Dysart is regally received, with fruit and wine and biscuits in her retiring-room; for the great Sonoro has the true traditions and the spacious manner; his deference is so profound as to transcend itself and attain somewhat the degree of grandeur. When he rubs his palms together they suggest a simile nobler than soap. Infinite pains and courtesy are expended on his favored sitters, dry-plates lavished, dark-

slides indefatigably renewed by the silent boy in buttons. Nor do results fail to justify the care. Presently Sonoro's show-cases bloom with Mrs. Dysart's beauty. Heads of rank are removed to make room for it, as if they threatened a throne. Everywhere in Spathorpe, beneath the gilding of Sonoro's name, Mrs. Dysart's semblance confronts the eye, in all species, from enlargements in vandyke brown to painted miniatures on ivory. For awhile her pictorial sway is absolute. The turn of her head becomes a tyranny, imposed on hundreds of subject-feminines, from fluttering school-girls who change color under the lens as if it were a suitor's eye, to neckless dowagers who swell in the face the moment the cap is off, and breathe, at each operation, like a 'bus horse mounting Ludgate Hill. Bella's features, too, are made scarcely less current than Mrs. Dysart's, and her sweet and open countenance and steadfast gaze acclaims the model for her age and sex. In one picture mother and daughter are shown together. Bella's arms encircle Mrs. Dysart's neck, her cheek pressed flat against her mother's own. The girl's gray eyes, fixed solemnly on the camera, seem to attest her proprietary pride in this object of her caress, and to proclaim her mother's virtue to the world. Mrs. Dysart's eyes, a little lowered, and deflected to rest upon her daughter's chin, reveal the half-smiling indulgent look which the Poet has such daily opportunities to note in them. His own portrait figures judiciously with these two, and accounts—with theirs—for one of the mornings when the Parade kept watch for them in vain.

XXVII

WITH the blazing of the national anthem the first act of the Poet's day comes to a close. Life, animated with a single purpose, pours homeward through the narrow channels of the Parade like the last sands that race through the neck of an hour-glass. The ratchets of the turnstiles click like the sewing-machines of a Hebrew tailor on Sunday. The trams glide up and down the cliff; the viaduct makes subdued thunder beneath the busy trampling of feet. The Powder Monkey disbands her retinue of Eton collars, and picks her way to the remote north. The Baron, wiping his eyes on an inflamed silk handkerchief, balances his umbrella by the waist and sucks cachous in the direction of the gasworks. The Admiral, shaking his head and prolonging in imagination the discourse with his latest victim, betakes himself toward the town. Twice a day this life is thus assembled and dispersed, articulated, member by member like the illusionist's skeleton, into a vitalized unity, and re-anatomized at a moment.

To the second act of the Poet's day belong those wandering excursions with Bella, already noted; the ride to Colbeck Mill, or roamings in the old town, or rambles around the gray stones and ruins of the Castle, where the sun falls fiercely hot upon these antique walls, and casts dank and dungeon-like shades behind them, and beneath the massy archways, in which the nostril—relieved from the scorching sunlight—detects the odor of nettle and moist weeds, fed by some unseen ooziings

in the soil. Or they bend their steps to the harbor, and seek a never-failing entertainment on the piers, peering into the reverberating blackness of the pontoon, where figures dim to extinction by contrast with the vivid outer sunlight play hissing hoses over the flooded floor space, and into echoing corners, to asperge the traces of this morning's sales. Or they gaze their way through the formidable stacks of reeking fish-boxes and pyramids of barrels that cumber the piers, dripping uncontrollable tears to their base, and filling the unequal rock with pools of brine. Fish-scales attach everywhere, to everything. Bella finds them on her shoes after a whole afternoon's walking; they float in stagnant bilge-water, and spangle ropes, and glisten, sun-dried, on the tarry woodwork, and are trodden to the hot stones like confetti after a night's carnival.

But then, what is not here to be gazed at and lend wonder to the eye that looks? The lighthouse, gleaming clear as a lantern slide against the deep blue sky; the busy boats that scull with reckless haste from pier to pier, churning oily convolutions in the water in their wake, that writhe like mocking laughter; the trawlers that line the harbor and rise and sink with the regularity of bosoms, creaking at their cables, and grinding their woven fenders against the revetment. In the intimate sight of all these busy wonders—in their close and personal company, so to speak—Bella's tongue is less the active organ we have known it on the Poet's balcony. To ask questions in presence of the marvels looked at savors a sort of impoliteness. Speech, for the nonce, is transmuted into sight, and adds its eloquence to her eyes. She vents O my's, and squeezes the Poet's arm, but it will not be till later that her lips shall reconstruct a wordy model of this they view, for memory to delight in.

For a space she holds the Poet whilst they watch

the rows of piscatorial boyhood on its belly by the lighthouse, lying amid blood-stained knives and disemboweled herrings, with fierce eyes fixed upon the leaded hook, lost to sight in the pallid green of the water below. Truth to tell, Bella looks as filled with tremulant eagerness as any of them, wondering what the water will reveal, and begging the Poet to hold her tight while she peeps over the pier's edge—until she sees the fearful exultation of conquest that makes fishing look fiendish, and kills her pleasure on the spot as she follows that bar of captive supple silver, drawn foot by foot to the cruel visage above. At that she clings to the Poet's arm in protest and bursts into voluble declamation against the wanton murder called Sport.

"Oh, come away, Roo! Let's come away. I hate fishing and boys that fish and kill things. It's cruel and wicked and wrong, and I should be glad if they fell in. No, not glad. But not a bit sorry, so long as they weren't drowned. They have no right to kill anything when the sun is shining, and everything looks so bright and happy—have they?"

And the Poet, who likes this slaughter of the finny innocents as little as Bella's self, says: "No, Mother Hubbard" (that is the name by which he sometimes calls her), and his heart is glad to find in one so dear to him a sympathy so sympathetic to his own, and they abstain from lending cruelty the encouragement of so much as a glance—for prowess is stimulated by every onlooker—but go to view their old friend *Admiral Collingwood*, who is the ancient paddle-steamer throbbing alongside the lighthouse pier—that dingy, weather-beaten veteran whose respiratory organs are a battleground for bronchitis, and whose day for long distances is done, but who plows the sea for short trips with placards on his bridge and funnel, equal in spirit to as

many passengers as board him. Bella and the Poet take two voyages with this battered mariner, who exudes steam and oil from all his heated pores, and they see Spathorpe strung out along the coast line like a necklet, looking oh! so flat and low-down in the water, as if a wave might swallow it. They have their own band on board, a fiddle, a cornet and a harp, that diffuse hot music soaked in engine grease—most dreadful fare for dubious stomachs—and more people lean over the boat's side than ever when the hat goes around. Bella is high up with the Poet on the bridge, where the bell is that the Captain takes hold of by a string around its tongue and shakes as if he meant to wring its head off. She has a glorious sinking beneath her blouse, mingled with a sustaining pride, and believes—on land—she could undertake a long voyage without being sick. The sense of comradeship is stirred by the shared element of watery peril; they know each other better, love each other more, when they touch the solid substance of the pier again, that is not so solid, after all, on their return (Bella notices) as when they left it, but seems to mock the movements of the ancient *Admiral Collingwood*, and to rise and fall beneath their feet with an insidious lung-like motion as if the stones were fluid, somewhat trying to the knees.

But oh! the joy to take the Poet by the arm and find here a steadfastness that wavers not, to hold him thus and look the world of glances in the eye, and say, by glance exchanged: "This is my brother, that writes all those lovely poems; that takes me voyages upon the water, and that buys me chocolates and pop-corn. Don't you wish you had a brother like this? O my!"

And then, perhaps, ensues the early tea in the sheltered green garden at Cromwell Lodge, where the unflagging fountain dances still to its own music; and

the long drive that all three take in the mellow sunlight before dinner, through the deep fringing woods and radiant high places of Spathorpe's loveliness, from whence—far below—Spathorpe is to be seen flushed and glorious; all her distant bricks and bristling chimneys softened and transmuted into the gleaming substance of a goddess' flesh, lit less by the sunbeams that shine on her than by her own serene and luminous smile. The twilight falls about them on their return, that soft, cool-cheeked twilight that kisses all things with its affectionate and endearing lips, and lays its caressive arms about them just as Bella does when she clasps her mother's neck. Other carriages are on the road with theirs, and many more have writ their traces in the dust, and left the fine impalpable powder of their passage suspended in the hazy air, to be precipitated by the later dews. But there are, thank Heaven, no ruthless motor-cars as yet to choke the hedgerows and blight the grass, tearing along the highways before the wake of wrathful dust that rolls in pursuit of them like a giant roused, or a swift and devastating prairie fire. Nor has Time brought forth as yet the motor char-a-bancs, that noisy monster that later is to ravage all these roads, blasting the herbage with its breath. They meet or overtake no worse than ambling four-horse wagonettes, filled sometimes with psalmodists and songsters, and the trumpeting coaches that ply between Spathorpe and the places around.

And thereafter comes the evening and her many lights by which the third act of the Poet's day is played. He dines—and knows it—more frequently than prudently at Cromwell Lodge, and is forever making resolutions that he cannot keep, and promises he must forswear. He tells Mrs. Dysart her hospitality shall be no more abused. "I am growing as tedious as a stale

quotation!" he says, and vows that the man who can never be counted on to decline an invitation is a menace to society. And yet, what avails all this when Mrs. Dysart pours her solvent smile upon his words out of the phials of her violet-gray eyes, telling him: "I see you are tired of us, Mr. Brandor!" and Bella cries "No, no! He's not tired of us a bit. Are you, Roo? He's only being polite. And of course he'll come. O my! He *must* come. I shall run to Mrs. Herring's and fetch him if he doesn't. And then mamma will sing and whistle for us after dinner."

So, between the mature invitation that the Poet feels he should decline, and the childish espousal of it that takes away refusal's ground, the Poet succumbs.

Spathorpe sees this trio at the play—in the dim stage box at the Desmond, and the older dimmer box still at the Queen, on whose cushioned balcony Bella claps her rapturous hands together and spills the clearest, dearest laughter into the auditorium, over the heads of the orchestra, so that they look up with reflected smiles, and even the players themselves cast an occasional glance of disciplined amusement toward this enthusiastic spectator who lavishes her plaudits on their skill, and can be heard to extol them to the two more shadowy occupants of the box behind her: "O my! Isn't that one splendid. I love her! Don't you?"

The circus—Ah! that betrays the flight of time, for the old Hippodrome in Marine Street has been defunct more years than lie on the fingers of both hands—the circus sees them after dinner, too. Bella loves the smell of sawdust and the pungent odor of the stable that fills the amphitheater with an atmosphere of expectation, and clings to the very cushions; and the proud piebald and skewbald horses, and all that made this wondrous entertainment what it was. When the painted clown, pur-

sued by the irate ringmaster, leaped into the fauteuils and took refuge at Bella's feet, what more delightful than her own delight? Each item in turn she likes the best, and ends by liking all alike, fearful of the least disloyalty to things once loved.

The Parade knows them not by artificial light, save when the glasses are leveled at them in the tiny Terrace Theater; or, for Bella's sake, the Poet and Mrs. Dysart go down to view the fireworks on a gala night, and breathe smoke and sulphur, and crane their necks in company with all the crowd to watch the flight of whistling rockets—whole battalions at a time, like comets gone mad; and stare fascinated at a Parade lit up with red fire into an inferno, thronged with the contorted faces of the damned; and lend their voices to the swelling Oh! of admiration that goes up, in tribute to the burst of shooting stars, plunging headlong, and of every color, to the sea—out of whose waters a second cluster, scarcely less vivid, springs up to meet them, and for awhile the boats scattered about the bay live in a lurid realm of fire, and the Poet and Mrs. Dysart both are reminded of Naples under the glow of vomiting Vesuvius. Out upon the beach, where the ice-cream vans and comestible vendors urge their trade, there are as many upturned faces as on the Parade, changing their hues like chameleons beneath the modulation of colored lights, from red to vivid blue, and orange, and the ghostliest of greens.

From time to time unlooked-for mortars are exploded, shaking the cliff and startling an exclamation from the unprepared crowd. The bombardment of Alexandria brings all to a close; the Parade blazes fire and belches smoke; Spathorpe shudders; the very sky seems throbbing like a beaten drum; one might expect to find the Castle prostrate in the morning. After this

life seems as empty as a rocket case; the lights of Spathorpe dull, and the bay an abyss of blackness, made only sinister by the harbor gleams that writhe their serpent course across it. The breeze-blown gas jets that outline the Parade look as if half-lowered already for extinction. Nothing remains but smoke and the smell of smoldering cartridge-paper. The Parade attendants are prompt to quench the candles in the Chinese lanterns, and blot out, one after the other, the fairy lights that twinkle around the parterres and sloping lawns.

Nothing remains, that is, for the Parade, but to close its blinking eyes and go to sleep behind its locked turnstiles, lulled by the sea, and shake off the evidences of this night's exuberance before the morrow. But the Poet's act is not concluded yet. The night is young—no more, indeed, than at the tenth hour, for Spathorpe (if at this date she dissipates at all) dissipates behind her blinds, and leads a public life that school-girls may be ruled by. The Poet in courtesy must see his charges home; in courtesy at the studded door must take his leave of them; in courtesy plead: No, no; he must not think of it! and enter thereupon, in courtesy, too, because Bella holds his arm captive and will not let him go, and Mrs. Dysart smiles extenuation of the brigandage, albeit, perhaps, she says: "Come, Bella! We must not keep Mr. Brandor from his friends." "He has no friends," says Bella promptly, "—but us!" "Surely, I think he must have," Mrs. Dysart returns, with her smile upon the Poet, and Bella cries: "No, no, he hasn't. Have you, Roo! We're his only friends in Spathorpe."

And then—for what reply can even a Poet make to this?—he enters with them, and helps to unwind Mrs. Dysart's bare white shoulders from their wraps, and they pass into the drawing-room, that is softly lit by

candles under amber shades, with candles gleaming on the polished desk of the piano, and a standard lamp communing with its own image in the undraped glass of the garden window. Here the coffee is brought—for their dinner has been sacrificed to pyrotechnics—with a cup of boiled milk for Bella; and Bella may sit up, by special license, until half past ten. But before Bella goes to bed—indeed, she vows, save this, she will not go; albeit the dire threat on Bella's lips has as little terror as water distilled, since it is sure Bella has no battery of scowls and tears and high-pitched cries and kicking heels to enforce the ultimatum, but will go to bed as obediently as the stars when she is bid—before Bella does this, her mother must seat herself at the piano beneath the discreet light of the shaded candles, that show a breast and neck as white, or nearly, as the keys she plays on, and make music for her guest and daughter, sometimes singing, sometimes playing, sometimes—for she is a skilled siffleuse—whistling æolian melodies to her own accompaniment.

These moments furnish ample occupation for the Poet's eyes and ears. He is all listener and looker-on, seated where he can catch the play of light and animation on the mobile face, and follow the graceful motions of her wrists and fingers, and drink in the music that flows from these and from his hostess' lips. If there be no great depth in Mrs. Dysart's music, there is feeling. It has a charm as cultured and as gracious as her smile. Her finger is femininely fluent; never forceful; her voice unstrained. She sings as if her lips were conscious of no listeners, but minister to her unattended ear, and never forces her voice to hard conclusions. Her whistling is infinitely subdued, with an ethereal harmonic quality not unlike the musical glasses that Bella and the Poet hear played at the aquarium by the young

lady in the sequined frock, with wet fingers. She whistles equally on an indrawn or outblown breath, executing the softest and most bird-like of trills; her lips thoughtfully pursed as if she blew on the meditative pipe in Arcady.

At half past ten the siffleuse lets fall her white fingers from the keyboard into the shadow of her lap and looks at Bella. "O my! Yes. I know!" says Bella, and displays as flexible and as beauteous obedience as her mother's music. She goes to the piano, puts her arms about her mother's neck, and rocks herself awhile as if composing her spirit for slumber, bestowing kisses upon this expansive whiteness with almost the reverence and profusion of a lover. And to the Poet, too, she comes and tenders her lips, voluble with kisses and projects for the morrow. And so, with many good-nights and tokens blown to both from her finger-ends, she takes her leave—surely, to the Poet's thinking, the dearest, sweetest, most lovable daughter on this side of the stars.

XXVIII

AND then, by right, the Poet should take his leave, too, and does, indeed, make some profession of doing so, for he rises to his feet with a prefatory "Well!" and smoothes the sitting-crumple from his vest, as though for departure. Mrs. Dysart's eyes are drawn from the piano by the movement.

"You are not going?"

"It is half past ten."

"But I was not asking the time."

"Unfortunately, Time does not wait to be asked!"

"How unkind of you! You might as well reproach a woman with her age as with the hours spent in her company." She makes a mock-indignant glissando with her fingers, and bites her lip.

"Ah! That is unfair. Consider me rather like the sun-dial that notes only the shining hours—*Horas non numero sed serenas*. Besides, I must remember the wrath of Æsculapius. What will happen if your pulse tells tales to-morrow?"

"Always suspect a man when he begins to be considerate. You talk of my health. I see you are dying to go."

"On the contrary."

"And doubly suspect the man that denies, for in these days the only thing worth denying is truth." As she smiles and talks, her right hand toys with the piano-forte keys; soon the left joins it in the bass. She breaks off with a jet of laughter, saying: "Well, I suppose I

must not keep you. You have had enough music for to-night." He protests: "No, no," and she laughs, and her fingers coquette with the keys once more, and the topic of departure melts away in mere words and laughter, and is no more thought or talked about till later.

And though Bella is the force that binds these two together; hers the fingers that weave them into this close garland of friendship, her presence, curiously, acts like a preservative to keep their friendship what it was. With her departure some subtle ingredient in the air at once seems gone; some childish freshening factor that plays upon looks and speech like the breeze through a dairy window, sweetening and cooling all within. When she bids good-night and leaves them with her kisses, the room grows appreciably warmer for her absence. The Poet hears the muffled beat of his own heart. There is a current in the air that might issue from the palpitation of flesh. Words and looks and motions are charged with a quality unknown before. Smiles meet smiles as if they were affinities. Words go hooded, and conceal sometimes their features. Nor does it take the Poet very long to see what sort of precipice it is on which his friendship treads.

Here is a woman whom, for the mere consenting, he could desperately love. The act, at this elevation of the feelings, is as easy, and—in a sense—the impulse as imperative as that that urges man to cast himself from a height. It magnetizes him. He has to summon all his will, call all his prudence to his aid, to keep his feelings from too violent maturity. Moments there are when scarcely the thickness of glass seems between this woman and himself. Nay! not so much, for glass gives passage to no flesh-warmed perfumes, no intoxicating vapors that mount through the nostrils from a woman's hair and

beauteous shoulders to the brain like curled incense to fill the raptured head-piece of a snuffing deity. Here is eternal beauty, molded in a woman's form, to satisfy a Poet's every sense, and make his heart disquiet and hungry. At times, when by her elbow he turns the pages of some music that she reads, the warmth of her blood, made warmer still by what she plays, reaches and invests him like a mist. His heart, half suffocated in fragrance and its own desires, rises in it—the more because he thinks (or is he, rather, sure?) this woman's sympathies reciprocate his own, that but a tissue parts them, that one word too many, one smile too much, one move across the borderland, one step beyond the precipice's edge whose seductive dangers yawn and beckon, and Fate's momentous curtain must be rent.

All love, as countless poets since the first flushed dawn of it have sung, is a madness, mild or furied, according to the degree; and yet the madness is not such, nor man's fury so, but that it waits upon his reason and draws its final sanction from his will. Some prudence stronger than the passion that shakes it, holds the Poet's turbulence in check; reason trembles and still stands firm. Where he most admires, he is most cautious; where he is most subject, he rules most regally; resistance by some high process seems proportioned to temptation. He is no anchorite, God wot! The hand that wrote "Mnemosyne's Daughters" and other verse, is fed with blood as generous as Falernian wine; he needs no other vintage to warm his veins and kindle his soulful self to strike the lyre of love. And does his harp demand a better theme than this? Why, if pride can move him, and pride moves many a lover, there is scarce a man in Spathorpe that sees or once has seen him with Mrs. Dysart but covets him the company of her, by sight alone; that has no knowledge of

that choir of graces seated around the throne of her beauty—the fascination of her voice, the cadence of her speech, the wit so delicate and volatile that lends its fragrance to her words, the culture of her mind and hands, the music she plays, the songs she sings.

Had she all these and less of beauty, or all her beauty and less of these, still her accomplishments or person would make her precious; but in their union she stands constituted a woman rare. He realizes and admits it. He is a worshiper in heart, though not of knee—an almost convert that thrills for the altar and yet fears the font. Where is his reason for this? In what remote recesses of his mind does this lie hid that sends its couriers to cry caution along all the highways of his blood, whispering its warning in his ear when his heart wavers?

It is the question he asks himself during these latter days, or rather, leaves wilfully ignored, for man cannot always muster requisite resolve to sift the tangle in his mind, any more than woman can to sort her work-basket, however much, in heart, each feels the duty call. Little more than a fortnight has elapsed, barely three weeks, since the Poet lay upon the sand and looked his first on Bella Dysart. But in Spathorpe, this sunny forcing-house of pleasure and emotions, all things mature amain. Life, knowing itself ephemeral, makes the most of its fugitive hours, as gnats do of sunlit moments, and by its activities lends a spurious enlargement to the day. The seed of friendship, here, germinates quickly, and is as quickly withered, for all things of accelerated growth tend to a weakness in their nature. Much more do the affections grow beneath the care of such a gardener as Bella. Life, indeed, has blossomed in this magic space of time; a richer, sweeter perfume fills it, like the hawthorn scent in spring. Bella blows through the byways of his being like a welcome breeze

from the sea, a constant freshening breath. Anon, the perfumed presence of Mrs. Dysart steals imperceptibly into these cooled places, and lies in the valleys of his heart like summer haze. Mother and daughter supplement and counteract each other.

Day by day Bella becomes more dear to him ; night by night Mrs. Dysart grows like a moon into that azure field of friendship in which Bella is the solitary twilight star ; first a silver sickle, motionless on the far hill, last of all a large and breathing presence, wonderfully near, and yet divinely vast and distant, whose luminous mantle sweeps her starry daughter and all these other orbs to the confines of heaven and lies upon the Poet's world in folds whose dark hollows are tremulous with the mystic music of the senses. What Bella may some day be, this woman is. Her daughter does not age, but freshens her. She fulfills the function of an asterisk, that serves to mark the mother's virtues by her own, showing in her those deliquescent qualities that, but for the childish commentator, might remain hid, like meanings in a text. Psyche and Venus divide the Poet's bosom ; the first speaks to his soul, the second to his blood. In a perfect balance of both, can life be better regulated ? Can days be more desirable than those that pass under their joint dominion ? But equilibrium is not even granted to the gods ; still less to humans ; and flesh—alas!—is a convicted perjurer that has betrayed man's highest and noblest aspirations, a traitor with whose suspected service mortals may not dispense any more than monarchs with ministers of their subjects' will.

At first the Poet affects disguise of danger ; sees no peril in words and light laughter shared with beauty, mere counters in the polite game of friendship that are agreed by social usage to have no value other than themselves, or that that the players agree to set upon them.

But the danger—if it be a danger—grows too palpable to be slighted. He shirks clearing his thoughts too scrupulously, lest they involve him in the difficulties of action. Is it that, like the young colt in the meadow, he flees the seduction of the corn-scuttle, scenting captivity behind the meal? Love's allurements he has met and fled before, has ruthlessly quenched the flame in his own heart, or has blinded his eyes to looks, and his ears to sighs. It is not that he is of those wantons who pursue love till it turn on them, and then seek their safety in flight, to prosecute warfare in less deadly fields. He is no philanderer by profession, and though his eyes may not always discern love with the exalted clearness of his verse, they never desecrate the sacred passion, or see it sordid. For him love does not count among the chartered pastimes; it is a holy rite, whose true performance needs altars and burning tapers, and incense, and all the sacred vessels of the temple. In love, for him, there is no low mass.

Does mere worldly prudence restrain him? Does he ask who this beautiful woman is, with power to stir and attract him so strangely?

To some degree he does—but the true poet-passion does not pore over facts like a ledger-clerk bent over figures, to arrive at its balance by items.

What fine hair-spring keeps his feelings in subjection? What is the ultimate essence of that tenuous restraint with which his admiration for Mrs. Dysart (not yet burst into a passion) is invested?

XXIX

THIS very night of pyrotechnics and fluctuations (that is the second of its kind) he comes near to make his bosom confess the truth of it—if truth be not too gross a term to apply to the subtlety of a feeling as yet all impotent to free itself from the senses in which it thrills embedded, a babe of the emotions but half born.

But his bosom yields that Bella is somehow involved in it; this passion aspiring to the elder woman is apprehended as a smoldering fault that loyalty should stamp on before its creeping fiery edges turn to flame. With midnight chiming in his ears, as he leaves the studded door behind him, and smoke and fire in his brain, he tries to ponder his position, and be true to the best in him. He knows he might have kissed this woman whose own fingers unlocked the door and let him out into the night cooled with stars and the salt sea. Nay, not only might, but nearly did; when that soft and naked arm stole around him to undo the latch and for a moment her blood-warm bosom beat against his own; and her liquid eyes deepened their smile as if portals opened for his admission; and the lips, slowly opening, made a place for his kisses.

In that moment, for it was no more, he might have dared to clasp this body of loveliness in his arms; to have sunk, through infinite sweetness, out of reach of all that restrained him, headlong, kiss after kiss, as if these were stars and planets and blazing meteors in the

firmament of passion, illuminating its space from end to end. There was his chance; he did not take it. A thought of Bella flashed across his mind instead; one false step and the crystal purity of their friendship would be shattered. The opening lips made way for words, not kisses; the eyes lent graciousness to farewell; the outstretched arm, with only the smallest fraction of a pause—that but a Poet's heightened senses could detect—undid the latch and let him forth.

He passed smiling, with nothing but his blood to register the moment, and they were guest and hostess once again: not impulses, trembling perilously to junction, like raindrops on a shaken sill. Mrs. Dysart bends her head for a sight of the sky and exclaims on the beauty of the night.

The Poet says: "The stars are lovely. Ever so many thanks for the music. Now you mustn't get cold."

"Nor you," she answers. "Don't be jealous. I am taking your published self to bed with me."

"Then you will soon be asleep."

"Do you think so? Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

But for the Poet at least, there is no virtue in the wish nor goodness in the night. Let us be honest and paint him not any nobler than he is. To know oneself the conqueror-presumptive of so much beauty is no mean thing. We may elevate the mind, but sex will still be true to itself: the lion in captivity, subject to bars, and rendering obedience to loaded sticks and red hot irons, but a roaring lion still, whose kingship lies in his noble savagery. The Poet is elated with that elemental pride, that sees passion in a woman as subjection—in a man, as conquest. If he had but a body, pride would fill it. But he is burdened with a mind as well, as spacious as a second world, and filled with so

many speculative and philosophic gusts that pride is extinguished like a taper in a high wind. This citadel, merely awaiting the sword, and jingling its keys already for capitulation, troubles him. He would rather know it armed, and bristled with defence. Retreat before a surrender that declares itself is worse than cowardice that submits to force. All his stratagem is required to prolong a combat that his heart knows ended. There is no wrath, his wisdom tells him, so terrible as the wrath of a woman whose passion capitulates in vain.

So far, this moment is averted. Each preserves, under a mask of sembled smiles, the show of independence. But should the frailer of the combatants, deeming his courage at fault rather than his conscience, lure him with a weak position, how then?

How then, indeed? Why has Mrs. Dysart no friends to intervene—no circle of tedious acquaintance to trample down the prolific weeds of opportunity? Man and woman in a garden soon or late must react the epic of Paradise. It is inevitable. High thoughts and aspirations are but grafts upon nature, like the mistletoe on an apple-tree. They show beautiful, but the sap that feeds and sustains them comes from lower earth. Always his mind reverts to Bella, and there finds its trouble and its peace. Her image comes as cool to passion as her wind-blown cheek to his own when, in the early day, she kisses him. Her eyes, grave and gray and steadfast, shine through him like a law. Her lips hold a reproach; or worse than a reproach, a childish confidence and trust he has the power to abuse. He is become her brother; does he seek to act the father, too? He might. For the object of his passion is beautiful enough, cultured enough, desirable enough. Those ten odd years between them would be consumed to nought in the furnace of love. And yet, he knows the

nature of this passion to be other; its fire capable, unchecked, of consuming more than conscience could control. And he says to himself—not in heroics, but in the vernacular of a man's heart: "By gad, I won't. No, no! I will be as circumspect as an owl. A fool I may have been; I will not be a cad."

XXX

MAN forms but a fraction of his own life. He is shaped, like it how little he may, by the deeds and comments of his kind. He comes into the world a prisoner; wears the slave-shackles of the centuries; is fettered with opinions in whose making he had no part; each stands at one and the same time slave and tyrant to his fellow, forcing this, and fearing that. Not the most independent of us but goes in manacles; not the strongest but is susceptible to a curl of the lip. So are we not only what we deem ourselves, but in part also what other people see us. With what rebellion we will, still must we bear the burden of the estimate society fixes on us.

And so, this conflict of divided nature that vexes the Poet's mind, is not the only influence at work upon his destiny. His destiny is subject to wider influences still. Other processes are busy. Spathorpe takes a part in it. This public eye that watches him, we may liken to another orb in heaven; a second sun, ungoverned by the hours and motions of the first, that rises betimes and sets late, and waxes bright and mercilessly hot, scorching what it fructified and making drought of those green places nurtured by its early beams. Man pays dearly for the interest of his fellows. Fame, at best, is but a livery, assumed in servitude like the waistcoat of the hotel porter, whose sumptuous gilding is a satire on the service demanded of it.

Thus, and soon, there grows a whisper on the

Parade. The Poet's name is spoken with an altered breath; eyes cut deeper in their scrutiny of him, and with a visible lessening of consideration, as if his senses were grown harder, or theirs more blunt. When he walks with Mrs. Dysart and her daughter through the crowded ranks of the Parade, regards buzz perceptibly about them. There are degrees even in the democracy of nudges, not to be mistaken by their student. By his sex the Poet is scanned with looks less curious than covetous; by women, with less of admiration than curiosity. Here and there are those that turn their heads as Mrs. Dysart goes by; and once, even, when she seats herself with the Poet and Bella on a bench whose further end two elderly ladies already occupy, the nearer of the couple rises from her place to the acid query: "Shall we go, dear? I think we had better!"

Charity shall put her best construction on the act. Perhaps these elderly people are caught at a disadvantage in a colloquy, like matrons at spring cleaning, with all their family cupboards open and their grisly skeletons exposed—though to the casual eye they showed as silent sitters, blinking withered eyelids in the sun. Or they may have taken their leave out of mere nice feeling, somewhat brusquely expressed that seeks to give these newcomers the freedom they have themselves enjoyed till now. Only Mrs. Dysart notices the act. Her sex divines it; not her eyes—for those her sunshade prevents. After a moment she twirls the interceptive sunshade to her other shoulder, and takes advantage to steal a glance at the departing figures. It is only a glance that falls upon them as by accident, from a countenance made gracious with smiles, but the glance would know these offenders again. Bella reads only the biggest print in life; she is no student of italics or marginal notes, understands nothing of the present page. To the

Poet, blindness is protective in a world where so much observation is practised. His aim is rather to ignore all signs than to see them lest he may be accused of seeking. Far is he from noting, further still from suspecting, any change in the constitution of this public world in which he lives. He perceives the same music and laughter; the same lightness and movement, the same bright sun, the same blue sea. Externally, life is what it was, the world immutable; the only alteration is within himself—unseen, he thinks, and unsuspected. And so Rumor stalks abroad, rustling like a painted lady in her gown of silks.

All in good time, or in the very worst, this shameless lady accosted our early friend, the Rev. Alfred Higginson. He was naturally not unshocked, and but that she appeared to him in the discourse of a brother divine, doubtless he had shaken her hand from his arm with Christian repugnance, and lent her no heed. Twice, to be sure, he said: "I can scarcely believe it!" but his brother divine held firm, and imparted much behind a benedictory hand. And after all, news is news, and women are women, and rectors are only mortal, and perhaps—to be quite fair—mankind propagates slanders less through innate malice than the pleasure of culling its fellow-man's surprise, and enjoying the wonder that its news creates. And vice in others, when everything is said and done, has at least this advantage as a topic, that it heightens the sense of self-respect in those that deplore it, and confirms them in a proper virtue. Without a sufficiency of neighboring sins to maintain the standard of its self-respect, the very fabric of society would totter. The wicked are as necessary to us as the poor; for the second cheapen the cost of labor, the first of virtue. In an exclusive society of saints, the cost of good living must be exorbitantly high.

And here, too, is a paradox that will bear thinking on. Will anybody deny that frailty is more common to humanity than its opposite, or that a good deed is less frequent than an ill one? And yet does the recital of ten good deeds excite as much surprise as a piece of scandal no bigger than a threepenny bit? Here, perhaps, is the truth of it. Virtue belongs to the family of conduct only by adoption; scandal is kith to our very blood. The Rev. Alfred Higginson might forget a fact or two in regard to the mission in Polynesia, for which his brother divine was the district secretary, but he did not overlook any part of that other and more stimulating news. Twice at the tea-table he gazed at his wife as if he wished the family absent, and his wife, with a woman's unfailing intuition, asked: "Well?" knowing there was news in store for her at the first suitable moment.

That was only one tea-table out of many in Spathorpe where the Poet's metamorphosis took place. And before long these whisperings came nearer home; and stray fruits in this Poet's Paradise began unaccountably to fall, mysterious omens for which no explanation could be given. One afternoon, for instance, Bella had pressed the Polliwog against the garden gate and was teasing him quietly in her own insistent and sober way, asking which of the star-fish at the bottom of his bucket were for her, whereas she wanted none, and he them all.

"This?" she asked, pointing her finger into the bucket, where the asteroids blinked under shaken seawater. The Polliwog's chin sought refuge in his neck—for he wore but a blue jersey, and had no collar in which the receding member might be secreted. A squint of the eyes and a shake of the head signified refusal.

"Well then, this one?" suggested Bella with the friendliest alternative, shifting the direction of her

finger. "You'll give me this one, won't you? You would, wouldn't you? O my! I think I'd love this one, and a teeny bit of the sea-weed too, for it to sit on. And you'd lend me your bucket, wouldn't you, to carry it home in, if I asked you?"

The Polliwog shook his head once more, with his eye-spaces so narrowed that Bella's glance could scarcely find admission. When Bella was at a safe distance on the balcony he had a repartee that served, but when this self-possessed young lady held him at close quarters, and her gray eyes scrutinized his countenance as if it were a map, speech failed him and he showed ambition to be gone.

"Won't you?" insisted Bella, curious to plumb the depths of this ungenerous refusal. "Why not?"

"It's sister's," said Master Machiavelli, with his face averted to the palings.

"Sister's?" asked Bella, with a new direction for her interest. "Which sister?"

The Polliwog's eyes contracted further. He looked like a cockroach squirming down a chink in the kitchen when the light is turned on.

"Blanche."

"Is that Blanche with the pretty blue ribbon in her hair?"

"Yes."

"And the check-straw hat?"

"Yes. That's Emmeline's hat."

"She's awfully pretty, isn't she?" Bella exclaimed, with a startling excursion into sentiment. "I should think you must be frightfully fond of her." The flame of enthusiasm in her countenance burned to a positive beacon. "Yes, indeed. I'm sure you must. You love her, don't you?" The fervor of her inquiry and the light in her eyes abashed the Polliwog into rebellion.

"I kicked her yesterday," he said. "And I shall kick her harder if she does it again."

"Oh!" cried Bella, with the most horrified reproof; the flame in her eyes all blown to turbulent consternation. What of rebuke she might have poured upon the Polliwog's luckless head will never now be known, for at that moment the name "Roger!" was boomed from some invisible point in space (though Bella searched the lower window keenly to locate the voice) and without a further word the Polliwog pushed open the gate and slunk up the garden path.

As soon as the door announced his arrival, the name "Roger" was repeated from the lower sitting-room. He wiped his sand-shoes with long and elaborate care upon the mat—till a third utterance of his name drew him somewhat hastily into the parental presence.

The Rev. Alfred Higginson looked up from the *Church Times* and faced the son on whom the future spirituality of a parish depends. The Polliwog's sisters were also in the room, slightly flushed with expectation and a little awe.

"M-m-yes!" said the Rev. Alfred Higginson, with a degree of deliberation in pronouncement of the word, signifying displeasure. "I'd rather you came in at once, Roger, without loitering at the gate, and mixing yourself up with people who do not concern you. What? . . . Because your father tells you, and because of the Fifth Commandment. Which is the Fifth Commandment? 'Honor thy——'"

"'Honor thy father and thy——'"

"'Mother that thy——'"

"'Days may be——'"

"'Long in the——'"

"'Land that the Lord thy God giveth thee.'"

"I would prefer you not to encourage any friend-

ship with the little girl you were talking to just now. She may be a very estimable little girl, but her acquaintance is not one which I desire you to cultivate. You have your sisters and brothers, and your mother and father—quite sufficient companions, I am sure, to remove all excuse for picking up undesirable friends. In future, please, understand that you are to drop these promiscuous intimacies, and be thankful you have good parents and sisters to take an interest in you and set you an example you need never be ashamed to follow.

“Ah! Now, come and show me what you have in your bucket. Do you remember the scientific name for this, that I told you the other day? A penny for the first correct reply! Now, Blanche—now, Emmeline!”

And the next time the Polliwog met Bella he looked as guilty as if he had a stolen herring under his jersey, and hung his head, and turned a burglar's lantern stare at the railings, and passed her by without a word, for all her lips were shaped to greeting; and thereafter shunned her abominably.

Even the Rev. Alfred Higginson—though he had never acknowledged Bella by any but oblique signs of recognition or good-will, seemed wrapped now in impenetrable reserve; and not one of the family—Bella noticed—ever turned a face to the Poet's balcony except from afar, when Blanche or Emmeline (never Roger) flashed a quick look backward.

Oh! Bella was grieved. Retribution she could have suffered, but her heart was innocent of crime, and ingratitude cut her. The Polliwog had dipped free and not too cleanly fingers into her chocolates and pop-corns, and caught them, at her throwing, from the balcony. And now, though he missed the chocolates, he pretended not to hear when she spoke from the Poet's window. Bella took her sad case to the Poet, and laid it before

him, arguing eloquently like another Portia, but the Poet only laughed. Little he suspected that her case, so sorrowfully put, was his, himself the cause of her penalties. He saw in Roger's baseness but the rude self-justification of an awkward boy, pushed, perhaps, by family twitterings of a fondness for Bella, into acts of aggressive denial—no more.

"He is a beetle," the Poet told Bella, "and ought to be trodden on."

"But I don't want him trodden on," said Bella. "I want him to be friends, like we were."

"Be bigger friends with me, instead," the Poet consoled her. "I will be as greedy as the Polliwog, and eat all your chocolates for you, if that is what you want."

"O my! We couldn't be bigger friends than we are, could we?" cried Bella, and in the rapture with which she viewed the noble architecture of their friendship, her grievance waned.

It was from this very topic that a curious little conversation started and took its course. The Poet was seated at his writing-table when Bella brought her grievance to the bar—hot from the injustice suffered—and she stood by the arm of his chair with one hand upon that and one upon the table. Of a sudden she propounded this startling conundrum:

"How do people really come to get married?"

To which the Poet answered: "I don't know, Bella. I never learned Chinese."

"It isn't Chinese," repudiated Bella. "It's a question. I asked mamma, and she only laughed and said there were a number of ways, all equally bad."

"I must not contradict mamma."

"They have to fall in love, first—haven't they?"

"So I have been told."

"Yes. Mamma says that's the very worst way of all. When people marry for love, mamma says it's like going to the dentist and having gas, and then waking up when it's all over to find he's drawn the wrong tooth. But I know she didn't mean that, for she was laughing all the time, and called me a funny girl."

Bella toyed with the Poet's paper knife. "What does it feel like, to fall in love? *Really* in love."

"Perhaps mamma might tell you."

"You've never been really in love, have you?"

"Never."

"Never with anybody?"

"Never with anybody."

"Would you like to fall in love some day?"

"Really—you take me unawares, Bella."

"Suppose—" said Bella, and lowered her face a little, to obtain a straighter view of his eyes. "Yes. Let's suppose. O my! I love supposing—don't you? Suppose I was older—lots older—as old as ever you like. What?"

"I didn't say a word."

"No. I know you didn't. Well?"

"Well?"

"Well—suppose *that*!"

"Well, I do suppose *that*, Bella—with all my heart."

At which point there came a pause. For awhile Bella's gaze rummaged deep in his.

Then she resumed with a slightly wavering: "Well—well, we've supposed that, haven't we? O my! Yes—we've supposed that. And now what was I going to say—can you guess?"

"Not in the least."

"Can't you? O my! Isn't it hard sometimes to say what one wants?" And then, with another look at the Poet's countenance, similar to that that a diver bestows

on the water before his plunge, marking the point aimed at, and calculating the spring-force needed, she let herself go, saying: "If I was so old as we've supposed—could you fall in love with me? *Really* fall in love?"

The Poet exclaimed: "Good gracious! But I am your brother!"

"Not my *real* brother!" Bella protested with an anxious face. "You aren't!"

"It's all in writing," said the Poet, "every bit of it—signed and witnessed."

"But not in blood!" Bella returned with manifest alarm. "You could tear it up, and burn it—nobody knows. Nobody would ever know. What?"

"I never said a word."

"No. I know you didn't. But do. Say you could. For we do love each other, in one way, don't we? O my! I'd fall in love with you—really and truly in love, if you'd only fall in love with me."

Where is the heart could withstand so soft an advocate as this? The Poet—always assuming the requisite flight of time and the monstrous accumulation of supposes—thought (without prejudice) he *could*. Yes. If Bella were an old lady, and asked him very nicely, he believed, indeed, he might be capable of obliging her. And a look of unutterable triumph came into Bella's face, wonderful to see. For Leonie (now she would tell the Poet why she asked him) Leonie, in a little altercation the other morning, had said: "Who would marry *her*!" (meaning Bella). "*Mon Dieu!* Only to think of it! There was no one in the world would do such a thing!" And Bella had been humble at first, and said: "Don't you think so, Leonie?" until Leonie's certitude could be no longer borne. Then, and not till then, Bella had said: "But yes. They would—somebody would. I know somebody that would, if I

asked him!" But when Bella had come to think over it she began to be frightened that perhaps Somebody wouldn't, after all! "That is, supposing, of course, that you were an old lady," the Poet interpolated.

"Supposing that I was an old lady," Bella acquiesced. "Of course! but not such a *very* old lady. I don't mean that. Not any older than mamma—not quite so old—perhaps nineteen, or twenty. O my! I don't know how old. How old do you think? Just whenever you liked to ask me."

The conversation went no further, and was not resumed, save (the Poet fancied) once or twice in Bella's eyes when he found them looking at him as if they meditated the word "Suppose." But he laughed later with the recollection of the colloquy, and stored it in his closet of dearer memories where the sentimental sprigs of lavender and faint southernwood were. Conscience passed the cupboard not infrequently on those later evenings spent with Mrs. Dysart. The fragrance of it, and the knowledge of the dear relics it contained, were in his mind when he registered that last resolve of circumspection.

XXXI

BUT meanwhile, more is in motion than the Poet's mind. Destiny has hold of him. He sees himself taking charge of his own fate and saying his *nolo's* and *volo's* as if life belonged exclusively to the liver of it and were not a mere perishable volume from the circulating library, subject to much mixed handling and possession. Of those outer influences bearing upon him he is no more conscious than of the computed weight of atmosphere beneath which mankind walks. *Quem deus perdere vult, prius dementat.* And not less true is it that whom Rumor threatens she first makes deaf to all her tongues. She comes so close to the Poet that her breath fans him, and still he does not suspect her by the rankness of it. She even follows him home, and is busy in the basement while he eats his meals above. Mrs. Herring and her maids are furnished with a new stimulus to hurry to the window when they think the Poet likely to emerge, and Bella's beauty is scanned more closely and more curiously when she visits the lower regions—though never less kindly, justice must admit—and guileless questions are asked of her, to test how much she knows, and compare the credibility of Rumor with the answers given, and the frankness of her lips and eyes.

Even the sibilant and toothless Herring becomes of more account in the kitchen and suffers less repression through a prudence that recognizes him as a possible purveyor of intelligence. Nor is he ignorant of the

source of this domestic toleration and his revived power, for he will say, at the least threat of a rebuke impending: "That'll do—or I'll keep what I've heard to myself." Whereat, though Mrs. Herring may retaliate: "What *you've* heard!" with a great display of scorn. "Dear me! It's likely folks will trust *you* with a deal!" she manages her contumely with sufficient judgment to save her credit, and not gain a victory at the total cost of what the vanquished has to tell. Rumor comes back at a snail's pace with Sir Henry Phillimore from the club, wrapped up in his plaid shawl, and that dim and visionary figure (who is chiefly known to the Poet as an infirm presence on the stair, or a cough in the night, or a door, part opened, that closes again as the Poet passes) may be seen behind the reflections of his window, hovering for a sight of the Poet when Bella's laughter or his own voice or footstep announces him near at hand.

To be sure, whatever poison lurks within these whispers, it passes here through an indulgent filter-bed and becomes, beneath the Poet's temporary roof, a quality little differentiable from kindly inquisitiveness. Mrs. Herring has her living to earn; she can make allowances for most shortcomings but her husband's. As befits one brought up in the service and wedded to an ex-butler, she inherits the conviction that vices are an appanage of gentility, not to be profaned by the vulgar, for whom morality was specially invented. Young gentlemen of independence like the Poet, who pay their weekly bills without scrutinizing a single item, and never ask for the second sight of a leg of lamb, are no more to be taxed on points of virtue than they are to be challenged for their Parade ticket by discriminating officials. Besides, Mrs. Herring and her maids are all avowed allegiants of the Poet's personal

charm, that admits no evil within the radius of his smile. Does not Louisa confess one night to Helen (in reference to Mrs. Dysart): "Ay! It's good to be some people." And does not Helen admit in return that she would like to be made love to, just once, by a real gentleman before she dies? And does not Mrs. Herring say: "Let him be as free as you will, Mr. Brandor is always the gentleman."

And what but rumor emboldened Herring—who serves as valet to the Poet and Sir Henry Phillimore—to breathe into the Poet's ear a supplication for the temporary loan of a mere trifle, now and then? "You know what women are, sir! She keeps me very close, sir; very close. At times I'm a little inclined to think she overdoes it. Always thinking of the future. Lays far too much stress on that, sir, to my mind. I say it's false economy. Isn't the present of as much consequence as a future we may never live to see? Still—she's a capable woman, and suits me very well, sir, and one's got to humor her a little. If I was to assert myself, sir, it would only breed dissension, and what's a 'ome with that in it? Liberality's my fault, I know, but it isn't a crime. I can assure you, sir, I feel very depressed at times when I go about without so much as a florin to lend a friend."

For, argues Herring, the gentleman with spirit enough to snap his fingers at propriety, is not likely to prove a niggard. Strict virtue, he has experienced, exerts a constrictive action on the natural impulses of man; a fixed principle rarely goes arm in arm with generosity. If the Poet had been a sporting man, to boot, Herring would have entertained an earlier hope of him, for generosity is one of the easiest virtues (and sometimes the only virtue) practised by those that make no great profession of any. Still, the ex-butler's read-

ing of humanity is not far at fault. Silver changes hands. He even reads his gentleman so well as to venture to say to him: "I've had Bucephalus given me good for the Crosby Stakes to-day, sir. If I'd half a crown to spare, I should feel sorely tempted to invest it. This is information, sir, not fancy. I haven't picked the horse out of the morning's paper with my finger, sir." It is true Bucephalus comes past the post in company with the Also's, and information hangs her head again, but gentlemen whose pulses dance to the possession of beauty are as free with their florins as a cab-driver of his opinions. They live in a world that despises prudence, and—provided the bleeding is discriminate—will yield no end of blood without demur.

And what but rumor draws the Baron to the terrace steps half an hour in advance of the time when Mrs. Dysart and the Poet may be expected on them, and lends him the needful audacity to raise his hat as if he stood for the Parade, and in its person saluted fame and beauty? The salutation is too profound to be ignored; too amusing to be resented—and yet, though deference and flattery seem to be the basis of it, the act interprets but the struggle of an aspirant to justify his pretensions and gain the entry to an exclusive scandal. On the strength of this salutation—accepted rather than returned—he will speak hereafter of Mrs. Dysart and her cavalier with an authority claiming far deeper derivation than his own bow. He lets it be inferred that he knows Mrs. Dysart of old; what he fails to disclose concerning her seems withheld out of honor; albeit, to tell the truth, there is little in report to which his reticence does not give a better sanction than the worst of words. Mrs. Dysart calls him "that desperately wicked little man"; Bella, "that funny little man" whom she thinks she rather likes, chiefly, per-

haps, because there is water in his eyes when he smiles, that touches her unsophisticated heart, unskilled, as yet, in differentiating tears. They do not know him as the "Baron," for their contact with the Parade is not close enough for that; Mrs. Dysart's name for him is "Monte Cristo." To the Poet he figures fantastic and unreal; not in any degree the stuff or substance of which his own destiny is compounded, and yet, if all its molecules could be exhibited, the Baron would be visible among the rest—with Mrs. Herring, and the almost mythical Sir Henry Phillimore, and a surprising collection of hundreds of unknown faces—more than ever the Poet could have imagined to take interest in him.

XXXII

THERE came to Spathorpe at the time when Rumor was at her height, a tall substantial-looking gentleman in a distinguished gray felt hat with a black band, who might be noticed on the Parade for a brief period. He was dressed in elderly serge, trod with deliberation like a man of consequence, smoked cigars leisurely, in whose pale blue wake connoisseurs dilated their nostrils with critical appreciation, and moved with an abstracted yet lenient and kindly interest in what he saw.

He stayed at the Sceptre. The letter R was on his leather. He signed the name "Ronsome" in the visitors' book, and interpreted it good-humoredly to the fair booking-clerk—whose forehead puckered up into incomprehending creases over its perusal—spelling the word whimsically out for her: R-o-n-s-o-m-e, and pronouncing it, "Runsm—Runsm." "Let's see," he said, in the atmosphere of friendly smiles engendered by the episode, "I believe you had Mr. Brandor staying here a short while since?" The fair-haired booking-clerk responded with alacrity: "Oh, yes!" for she had not yet forgotten the sweetness of the Poet's smile, that her artifice sought occasionally to prolong. "You mean the gentleman that writes the poetry, don't you! But he has been left here three weeks now. He came in July."

Without appearing to reflect on the curiousness of his informant's idiom, the elderly gentleman admitted the truth of what it expressed. Yes, Mr. Brandor had

moved into private rooms along the Esplanade. Did she happen to know if they were far distant from the hotel? She knew, and could assure him. Not at all. Indeed, they were close at hand. She drew their situation on the visitors' book with the reverse end of her pen, pitted all over with tiny teeth-marks where reverie or perplexity had bitten it, and the gentleman thanked her, saying—or so the booking-clerk understood him—that he must call before leaving Spathorpe.

But if that were his intention, it was never fulfilled. Less than an hour afterward, while he took tea amid the basket-chairs on the hotel veranda, a landau, drawn by a pair of bays, drove briskly by. A golden-haired girl was seated with her back to the horses. The other occupants were a lady beneath a chequered sunshade, who raised the edge for a discreetly interested peep at the hotel in passing, and a young man in a straw hat. The girl's face was the only face visible for more than a glimpse, but something about the poise of the straw hat and the debonnair boy's figure recalled memories in the gray-bearded gentleman's mind. He said to himself: "Surely!" and half rising from his chair, took a second glance at the receding landau.

A military-looking man, occupying two chairs a few paces away, with a newspaper across his knee, who had begun to preen a self-opinionated moustache with a cigar between his fingers the moment he caught sight of Mrs. Dysart, misread the elderly visitor's attention for the same character of curiosity as his own. The sharpened look in his eyes met and made friends with the gaze of the gentleman in blue serge. Their smiles engaged for a moment, and the military man spoke.

"Our rising generation!" he said.

The gentleman of the name of Ronsome, not quite understanding the allusion, acknowledged it with a

polite extension of his smile, and stroked his beard, asking: "Who is he?"

"The Byron of our days," exclaimed the military spectator. "By Jove! And wants everybody to know it, too. Always the way with these youngsters. Can't keep their first watch in their pockets, and wouldn't smoke or drink or play cards or do half the silly things they do if there wasn't a public to look at 'em. The same with the petticoats. As soon as they pick up a fine woman they must parade her in public like a mare round the show ring. Kick up such a devil of a fuss when they're at their alphabet; have to spell out everything aloud to let people know how clever they are, but when they've once learned to read they read with their mouths shut, and keep things to themselves." He blew two trumpets of smoke through his nostrils and brushed a heavy fall of cigar-ash from his waistcoat. The gentleman of the name of Ronsome, still somewhat on the shady side of all this intelligence, though gauging the strength of sunlight elsewhere caused by the shadow cast upon his understanding, stirred his tea and asked carelessly: "Let's see. What is his name?"

"Brandram, or Brandreth, or Brentworth, or some such name."

"You don't mean Brandor?"

"Brandor. To be sure! That's it. A poet or something of the sort. Plenty of money by all accounts. Must have, or he wouldn't be driving by the side of Isabel Dysart. She hasn't taken Cromwell Lodge for nothing."

"And he's in partnership with this woman?"

"Unblushingly. Makes no bones about it. Why! You saw for yourself. I'll give him his due; he's a good judge of women. Did you see her?"

"But surely, he's not living openly with her?" Behind his smile the gentleman of the name of Ronsome showed more incredulosity than curiosity.

The military man laughed, betraying a touch of asthma.

"Depends what you mean by 'openly,'" he decided. "If being with her at all hours of the day, and leaving her house at all hours of the night isn't 'openly,' I don't know where we are to look for a better word."

Ronsome smiled with acquiescence, but his comment was: "Of course, that's circumstantial. You'd scarcely condemn a man on that."

The military man agreed. "True, true. Not on that. But the woman's known. I was up at the club last night. Sir Archibald Elliott happened to look in. Said it's common talk that Cohen was keeping her up to a few weeks ago. You know Lewis Cohen, the diamond man, that went to America last month, and left a letter in his bedroom saying his head was going round, and disappeared. Wanted people to believe he'd done away with himself, but was seen a few days later in New York with his lip shaved. Frightful smash. Just about the time this woman came to Spathorpe. It threw her heart out of gear. Old Hayhew had to attend her. Know him intimately. Says she's a charming woman and makes a medical man's profession very hard. Egad, it's lucky for her this fellow's turned up, for she's taken Cromwell Lodge and done no end at the place. Sent a heap of the old furniture into storage, and got in her own stuff from Hornbeam and Tinker's. Cohen would have had to foot that bill if he hadn't come on the rocks."

This, and more, the military man imparted to Ronsome, for he was of the species to whom talking is a need, and a good listener as solaceful as a choice cigar.

It came therefore with something of the force of a shock when Ronsome admitted he knew the Poet—or at least, had thought that he knew him—adding:

“But we learn by living. Men change their habits with their clothes. It’s some time since I spoke to the fellow. I had rather thought of calling on him, but under the circumstances I don’t suppose he’d care to be prosed to about old times. He prefers the new. Besides, he seems developed into a bit of a fool.”

The military man was visibly nonplussed. He spluttered into apology like a kettle, just come to the boil. “Awfully sorry!—I beg—of course you understand—had no idea—not the least desire to make mischief.”

Ronsome smiled in absolute forgiveness.

“On the contrary, I’m much obliged to you. Common talk is common talk. It’s well to hear it, and know where one stands.”

In which the military man concurred, though his assurance seemed somewhat shaken, and his sentences showed a tendency to begin with conjunctions and words of extenuation and contingency. It is also notable that he fought shy of the gentleman of the name of Ronsome during the two or three subsequent days of his visit, and no further conversation of the least moment passed between them.

But the elderly gentleman with the distinguished gray hat and black band, who trod with such consequence and smoked such excellent cigars, did not lack the use of his eyes, and the military man’s indiscreet confidences served as a valuable introduction to the study of the Poet and Mrs. Dysart. Several times he saw them on the Parade, contemplating their movements with a keen but not unfriendly eye from some com-

manding point upon the balcony, and taking notes of their reception, after which he trod his leisurely way, wrapped in the fragrance of his cigar and the genial introspection of his smile.

XXXIII

AND one day, very shortly after the gentleman of the name of Ronsome had taken leave of the Sceptre, there came a telegram for the Poet. Bella was with him at the time, for they were just on the point of setting forth for their preliminary morning's ramble, and her eyes grew instantly large and grave when the missive was put into his hand. She had the superstitious dread of her sex for those emblems of trouble and catastrophe, apparitions from the unseen world presaging sorrow, and breathed the most lugubrious "O my!" as the Poet's finger tore a ragged path through the brick-red envelope. "It's nobody dead?" she asked after a moment, in a pallid tone of voice. Her thought flew to Daisy, and to tell the truth, this name was the first to flash across the Poet's mind when he took the telegram. But his eyebrows, as he read, illustrated amusement more than concern.

"No, Mother Hubbard," he answered. "It's nobody dead, thank goodness. It's somebody very much alive—O, like the mussels the man was singing last night."

"O my!" exclaimed Bella; a radiant "O my!" this time, beaming gladness and relief. "Some one coming here?"

"Yes."

"To Spathorpe?"

"To Spathorpe."

"When? I hope soon. O, say it's to-day."

"It is to-day."

"O my! I guessed that, didn't I! How lovely. Whoever is it? Stop! Let me guess that, too. Somebody I know?"

"Somebody you know."

"Daisy? It can't be. Is it?"

"No, not Daisy."

"No. I thought it couldn't be. That wasn't the guess. Wait a bit. Don't tell me. Was it Vic?"

"No, not Vic."

"No. And *that* wasn't the real guess. Let me think ever so hard. Show me your eyes. Yes. Ah! You winked! Now I know. Is it—is it——"

"Who is it," asked the Poet, "that looks over his pince-nez like this, and says: 'Well, well! I say no more!'"

"Mr. Pendlip!" cries Bella, clapping her hands together. "Mr. Pendlip. I'm sure it is. Is it? Am I right?"

"Yes."

"O my! That was the real guess. I guessed that, didn't I! I knew I could."

And then, having been admitted, as it were, by a side door to the truth, ran around to the front, where she saw the full wonder of it, and exclaimed rapturously: "No, never! Not to-day! Not so soon! It can't be!"

But the poet put the telegram into her fingers, and Bella read it with proud importance, for, of course, to be made partner to such a communication as this, is to occupy a very exalted place in the Privy Council of Friendship. Twice Bella read the message through, aloud, and her delight and wonder grew. To think that the mighty Mr. Pendlip, whose august tread through the corridors of her mind had made imagination trem-

ble with pleasurable awe—to think he was about to burst the bondage of investing fancy, and become substance and reality all in a moment, like the mayfly. What a prospect! What thrilling unanticipated joy!

“O my!” said Bella, taking the altitude of the occasion by means of her familiar words. “I can scarcely believe it. Can you? This very afternoon. And shall I really see him?”

“Indeed you shall.”

“And speak to him?”

“If you like.”

“I *do* like. I would love it. Ever so much. Do you think Mr. Pendlip would like, too?”

“Think isn’t the word.”

“What is the word?”

“It’s two words.”

“What two words are those?”

“Perfectly certain.”

“Are you? Really? Perfectly certain? Of course, it isn’t as if we didn’t know each other, is it!” Bella urged. “We know each other as well as well by letter, don’t we! And I mustn’t forget to ask him how Daisy is, and Mrs. Pendlip, too. Perhaps Daisy will have sent me a message by him. I’d love it if she has. What message will it be? Can you guess? Not in the least? Oh, tell me lots of things about her and all of them, now Mr. Pendlip’s coming.”

To all these raptures the Poet freely responded, ringing to them like a wine-glass under the sung note; but whether he shared the girl’s joy, or hailed his erstwhile guardian’s coming with quite the gladness shown is perhaps open to doubt. Mr. Pendlip’s telegram offered no explanation of this hurried visit; it merely stated a fact, a time, and a wish. The sender was on his way to Spathorpe. He would arrive at half-past four. And

the wish was crystallized into the two plain words, "Meet me." In all of which there was nothing extraordinary; yet it is the weak spot shows the sharpness of the wind, and though the Poet has choice of a dozen reasons to account for Pendlip's coming, something uneasy in his conscience seems to suspect them all and gnaw at a reason beyond. The query grows into a sort of burden that he finds himself reiterating every now and then:

"I wonder what old Pendlip wants;
I wonder what he wants. . . ."

He is stirred with curiosity to the extinction of natural gladness. Pendlip assumes the property of a conundrum, that is to be solved at half-past four o'clock this day, and still perplexes him into the present propounding of it, though he is aware no answer of his own can satisfy his curiosity or rest his doubts. Whatever natural explanation he may set upon this telegram and Pendlip's coming, the query always confronts him: "But why didn't he send a letter? Couldn't he have written last night? What's bringing him off in such a hurry?" "It can't be——" he begins incredulously, and breaks off at that, and will not admit a probability so wild, though it shows tenaciously through all his more reasonable hypotheses. He believes in the hypothesis no more than he believes in ghosts, and yet—in his present darkness—it has a tendency to haunt him; for men who disclaim all faith in specters by day find somewhat less comfort from the lack of it by night, when strange things happen for which mere scepticism can give no adequate account. The best they can do is to counterfeit the presentment of courage, swagger in face of their own fears, and try and attain to carelessness through mimicry of it. The Poet, for instance, after his first

puzzled perusal of the telegram, treats the matter with exuberance, asking Bella whether he ever mentioned to her in the course of conversation that Mr. Pendlip has a wooden leg? Bella says: "No! Never!" whereupon the Poet expresses his pleasure to find that he has always spoken the truth of Mr. Pendlip and exhorts Bella to cultivate this priceless quality and speak of her friends as she finds them.

Yet the Poet's rejected hypothesis lies nearest to fact, and this telegram may be taken to signify that Report has at length been checked in her career like a runaway cow, and is being driven dangerously back upon the Poet's plate-glass happiness. Later, there will be a crash, for he does not even yet suspect that such a beast is at large—still less that kindly hands are urging her toward him—and so his large and candid windows remain unprotected by a single shutter.

XXXIV

ONLY the day before, Mr. Pendlip had paid for two luncheons at his club, and borne home afterward the fateful intelligence. His emotion was a business man's emotion, flowing like a frozen river beneath its frigid crust of ice. Now and again the ice cracked and his visage showed a smile; he laughed, but the laugh was a gloomy fissure, leading into watery depths below. Of all offences, folly—that is itself the lightest—seems the hardest to forgive. Irrevocable faults we pardon; but active follies do not rouse in us emotions deep enough for clemency. They touch impatience, but fall short of magnanimity. Here was the boy to whom Richard Pendlip had stood second father; who had flinched in days gone by before his necessary wrath; who had never lied, nor played the traitor to his own honor. Such a boy—save for the lack of finance in him—as Pendlip might have desired for his son; high-spirited, sensible, gentle, truthful, possessed of a disposition lofty enough to be called noble, but for a certain carelessness in it; a boy on whom care had been expended, and anger when requisite; and prides based and aspirations reared. And now—to be throwing his character to the four winds as a quack-doctor flings abroad his leaflets—— What folly! What senseless folly!

As he walked up the carriage drive of his Dulwich home—the carriage drive that Bella's fancy had paced so many times toward the peristyle she knew so well—

the sound of its pebbles awoke the echoes of years. He saw the Poet as a pale-faced child at play in his first shrimp-like black knickerbockers—the badge of his bereavement—that Pendlip could have worn for a mit-ten on his own large hand, and the contrast forced an interjection from him. “In Spathorpe!” he exclaimed, with as much impatience to himself as though he stood delinquent to his words. “Of all places in the world! Bang under everybody’s nose. Was there nowhere else he might have made a fool of himself?” And he looked forward unpleasantly to the feminine consternation when Mrs. Pendlip should gaze upon the altered features of this cherished boy. Unemotional men feel other people’s emotion keenly, the more for not sharing it, perhaps. “The fellow’s been spoiled!” he decided, as he singled his latch-key from a jingling bunch, and blew on it vehemently to dislodge supposititious dust and express impatience. “He’s had his own way in every-thing. We’re all to blame. Poetry’s not the stuff to make men of.” However, in his own hall he tapped the barometer with customary cheerfulness, blew out his lips in mute simulation of whistling—though his head con-tained not a single tune—and sauntered into the room across the hall through whose door came sounds of desultory music and conversation.

A girl whose face and hair were both of the same light obliterative shade, but who—had she been less pallid—might have made claims on beauty of the deli-cate and transitory sort, was seated at a boudoir grand in the far corner of the room, near the conservatory. Traces of her recent illness lay still upon her waxen cheek, and in the fragile whiteness of her fingers. On a chair by her side, too, was a shawl, as if for use when she moved about the house. She was turning the pages of a bound Chopin listlessly with her right hand,

and picking out occasional bass passages with her left—though her face was turned toward the center of the room, where, in the cool depth of a cretonne-covered chair, Mrs. Pendlip knitted a woollen comforter for one or other of her autumn beneficiaries, stopping from time to time to probe her cheek reflectively with a foot of shining steel, and repose a look of maternal care upon her daughter's profile; or, when the latter turned in discovery of the look, to smile and exchange words with her. Close to the elder woman's elbow the afternoon tea-table was spread, and there were evidences that the meal had been already taken. An empty cup with crumbs in the saucer stood upon the pianoforte desk; the spirit lamp beneath the silver kettle was extinguished; the layers of fine-cut bread and butter were reduced. At Mr. Pendlip's entrance the knitting-needles were dropped into the worker's lap. His wife did not look around, but said: "Richard," and adjusted her spectacles for the sight of him when he should pass her chair. The girl laid one hand on the pianoforte stool, and leaned out beyond the keyboard with a smile of greeting.

"No, no," her father protested when he saw her close the pages of the book and make as though she would desert the piano. "Go on, Daisy. I don't want to stop you."

The girl said: "I was just finishing, father."

Her mother interpolated: "She must not tire herself, Richard."

"Of course not. To be sure, to be sure. Don't tire yourself, Daisy."

The girl disclaimed fatigue, and Pendlip asked her how she was feeling now. "Stronger, are you?" "That's right, that's right," he exclaimed, when she assured him:

"Heaps stronger. I'm ready for Spathorpe any time, now," and coughed in saying it.

"Not quite, dear!" Mrs. Pendlip cautioned her, restrainingly. "We mustn't run the risk of further cold. It would be most unwise. Another week, dear, when we see how you're going on."

The girl made a mock face of resistance to authority and confessed: "I hate being an invalid. It's so silly; particularly at this time of the year. In the winter it's something to do. Spathorpe will be over by the time we get there. Rupert says it's the tennis tournament this week, and after that the season tumbles to pieces."

Pendlip did not espouse the topic of Spathorpe, nor warm to his daughter's suggestion that she felt fit enough for the mixed doubles. "Is there a cup of tea for me, Rachel?" he asked his wife, who dropped her knitting and adjusted her spectacles with a cry of self-rebuke:

"To be sure there is, Richard. I never thought. But the tea must be clay cold by now. We did not know when to expect you. Let Daisy ring for some more——"

Pendlip restrained her. "Not on my account. Just half a cup. I don't mind how cold or black it is. No sugar, Daisy." He picked about among the dishes. "What are these? Sweet, are they? No, let's have some bread and butter. I'm not hungry." He clapped two of the slices together, face to face, and bit them with manly amplitude, walking to and fro and saying "Hm's" and "Ha's" through the muffle of what he ate. The conversation sustained itself by means of their brief prosaic phrases common to those whose daily lives are so intimate as to render speech superfluous. Pendlip recorded the heat in the city and enumerated sundry

meetings with individuals known to him. "Saw so-and-so at Victoria"; some one else near Threadneedle Street.

After awhile, when his interest in mastication flagged and he pronounced himself at the end of his meal, Daisy said she would go to her room and write to Rupert before the twilight fell. She had not answered his letter yet. Mrs. Pendlip adjusted her spectacles again—an act apparently as essential to speech as to sight, since she rarely spoke or looked but that she did it first—and approved the decision.

"I am sure Rupert will be very anxious to hear from you. It must be rather lonely for him, poor boy, all this time. He will be very glad to have us there."

"I don't suppose he minds—much. He has made friends already," Daisy retorted.

"That funny little girl seems always with him. Who is she, I wonder?" Mrs. Pendlip remarked in a low but emphatic voice. "Of course—she is only a child. It is not a serious friendship."

Pendlip, walking to and fro, made the elaborate mouth movements of a man at the conclusion of a repast in his own house; screwed his lips; clapped his hands to the solid portions of him, affecting an obliviousness of the conversation. Not till Daisy threw the shawl around her shoulders and left the room did he enter speech again, but his absorption carried no new character or special significance, for often he brought business into the drawing-room in this guise, and after a few preliminary words would be lost to the voices of his family, breathing his financial fee-fo-fums to himself, and only being drawn to the portcullis of this impregnable castle by a double summons from without. But the moment the door closed on the wrapped form of his daughter, Pendlip stopped before the fireplace, his lips compressed, the space between his legs shaped

to a pyramid, his hands clapped resolutely to his bulwarks. For awhile he was silent, but the something momentous in his attitude reached and touched the wife as with a hand. She let fall her needles anew, rectified her glasses, and turned a quick glance toward the towering figure, with the utterance of her husband's name.

"Richard?"

XXXV

"I LUNCED with Ronsome at the club, to-day," Pendlip began. "He's just had a week-end at Spathorpe. Told me a little news."

Something in the dry calculation of her husband's tone prepared her—as he had intended it should—for some unwelcome intelligence. She scanned his face to read its tidings, a knitting-needle laid apprehensively across both her lips.

"About Rupert?"

"About Rupert."

"There's nothing the matter with him, Richard? The boy's not ill?"

"Never better in his life by all accounts. Only making a fool of himself. That's all. With a woman."

She cried: "Richard!" blankly, looking at him for awhile as if his presence were unfamiliar. Then a fear dawned upon her. "The boy's not going to be married? Don't tell me he's married already."

"I am sorry I can tell you nothing so reputable."

"You don't mean to say——"

"Unfortunately, there's nothing else for me to mean."

He spread his hands, palms outward, to the empty grate, as if to catch the comfort from a fire, and began to unfold the death certificate of the Poet's virtue from his puckered lips. His language warmed with what he had to impart; now and again he slipped an expletive into his words. Mrs. Pendlip, long habited to these

venial warps and knots in masculine nature, accepted them from her husband almost devoutly, like pulpit imprecations sanctified by place and usage, alive only to the substance of what she heard, breathing her husband's name as a vehicle for incredulity, articulating rapid double T's.

"I can't believe it, Richard," she reiterated. "It is not like Rupert. Rupert would never condescend to such a thing. There must be some mistake. It can't be true. Why! He's only a boy!"

"Past his majority!" Pendlip exclaimed. "And you call him a boy! Growth's a thing you women never understand. If you'd ever known James Ronsome in his school jacket, you'd say he was a boy to this day. Rupert's at the very age to play the fool—when a fellow's just shaken loose from authority, as Ronsome says, and hasn't yet reached his own wisdom. And Ronsome's not the man to pick up cock-and-bull stories. He only came back from Spathorpe on Tuesday—saw the thing with his own eyes. Says it's as plain as a pikestaff, the talk of the place."

Mrs. Pendlip shook her head in melancholy pledge of faith to the boy. "He must have been led into it. He would never have done such a thing by himself." Adding: "Who is she? If she's anything very dreadful, don't tell me, Richard. I think I'd rather not know. Poor Daisy! Poor Daisy! To come just after her illness, too."

"Ronsome tells me her name's Dysart. The wife of an army man."

"Wife!" cried Mrs. Pendlip, her lips recoiling from the title with as much alarm as if it had been an apparition. "But her husband's not living, Richard! You don't mean there's going to be a scandal?"

"Going to be!" Pendlip retorted. "There is! Ron-

some says he's heard that Dysart is out in the Argentine somewhere. She's a married woman with a big fine daughter. That's the girl that's always hanging round him, and writes postscripts at the foot of his letters. Damn it!" he exclaimed, as the preposterousness of the act enlarged under the eye of indignation, "But Rupert might have played a cleaner game than this. What right has he to mix us up in his tomfooleries? Here I've been sending our messages all this time to the daughter of a—— Good Lord! And there's Daisy just going to do the same if we don't stop her. What's to be done? What's to be said to her? We can't go to Spathorpe now, on any consideration. That's out of the question. Ronsome tells me their photographs are stuck up in every show-frame in the place. They drive about in a job-master's carriage and pair. He's with her the whole time, and the policemen see her letting him out of her door in the small hours. Damme! Does he mean to ruin himself?"

He let his indignation have vent for awhile, disgorging what Ronsome had confided over the luncheon table. Several times he made use of the familiar formula: "Well, well! I say no more" that served but as the starting point for a fresh disquisition. What he did to ease himself by means of anger, his wife did through the medium of a more temperate sorrow, saying:

"Poor boy! Poor boy!" "Don't be hard on him, Richard." "Dreadful, dreadful!" Only when her lips touched Mrs. Dysart did indignation flash upon them. "A married woman. Monstrous! If she'd been a widow without encumbrance, or—or anything else—and that's terrible enough. But a married woman, with a grown-up child. To take advantage of a mere boy! Has she no conscience? Does she never think he may have friends, and others, dear to him? or how she would

feel if he were a son of hers, and she some other woman?"

"You were always a girl, Rachel," Pendlip blurted out, with an impatience not devoid of kindness and even of admiration." There are only two genders, and yet you know neither. When it's men, you talk as if it was women; and when it's women, you expect them to behave like angels. Well, well!" He did not add: "I say no more," though the conclusion seemed inferred. "It's no use crying over spilled milk. What's done can't be undone. The thing is, what's to be done now? Are we to shut our eyes, or are we to do something? Which is it to be?"

Mrs. Pendlip reiterated: "Shut our eyes!" denouncing the idea by mere inflection. "It is not my husband that asks such a thing. There can be no doubt. Of course, we must do something. We must help him, Richard. At once."

Pendlip posed a grim "How?"

"You will have to write to him without delay. Tonight."

"And what say?"

"Appeal to his better nature. He has one still. Bid him renounce this wicked folly. He had better come home immediately. All shall be forgiven. Remind him of Daisy. For her sake we must do something. The girl is devoted to him; you know what we have always hoped. Of course—not a word must be breathed to her. It would distress her terribly, Richard, perhaps induce a misguided sense of independence. Particularly after her illness. She needs all her strength."

While she spoke her husband slowly paced the floor, fitting his feet precisely to the pattern of the carpet, with his hands clamped behind him, and his lips puckered like a canvas purse. The fact was, another in-

fluence overrode his own, and that influence Ronsome's. All men—or, to render the statement less susceptible of contradiction, most men—have a sphere in the realm of their nature which comes readier under another's rule than their own; a department of mind where their will governs less absolutely, and submits with little resistance to the sway of another. In the dominion of facts and figures, Richard Pendlip was an autocrat, valuing few men's opinions before his own. In the dominion of the humanities, though his visage showed no change, his tread grew less authoritative. Left to himself in such a matter as this, he might have blustered aimlessly like a March wind, or developed a wrath more gusty than discreet. But the influence of the luncheon table dominated and disciplined him. He reposed secretly on the wisdom of Ronsome. It was Ronsome—once his indignation had subsided—that spoke through him; whose words he quoted sententiously, as he might do the political pronouncements of his morning paper, merely lending the force and conviction of his own tongue to opinions already stamped and stereotyped.

"I asked Ronsome," he told his wife, "'what's to be done?'" He said: 'Good Lord, man! Don't mistake my motive in telling you all this. I'm just giving you the information for what it's worth, because knowledge is as useful as a little small change in the pocket at times.' 'But surely we've got to do something, Ronsome!' I said. 'We can't let a thing like this go on and take no means to stop it. We are the boy's nearest. You can't deny we have a duty.' 'I don't want to deny it,' says he. 'But duty isn't always wisdom. Life's full of little things that a wise man does well to pretend he hasn't seen. If you were an old woman, Pendlip—which, thank God, you're not—

you'd rush off without a moment's reflection and stir up the water until you could see nothing for mud, that would take Heaven knows how long to settle. And when you'd mulled the whole business hopelessly, and the fellow was acting the double fool out of sheer annoyance and silly resentment, you might salve your conscience with: "At least I've done my duty." "What!" I tell him. 'Do you want us to sit with our fingers in our mouth and watch the boy go headlong to ruin, Ronsome?' 'I don't want you to put your fingers in your mouth at all,' says he, 'unless it's any satisfaction to you. But at least they're safer there than plunged into somebody else's stew that's a damned sight too hot for them, and perhaps upsetting the whole dish. So long as you ask my advice—and I take it you *are* asking my advice—I say, be quite sure the stew's had time to cool. It's no good preaching reformation to a drunken man; you've got to wait till he's given over hiccoughing, and has a head on him that conduces to reform. If this fellow were a son of yours—which he's not; and if he were dependent on you—which he's not; or, if he were in any way under your authority—which he's not, then your course might be clear. You could stop his supplies and starve off the woman. You'd soon be rid of her. But it seems to me you've no power beyond what he's willing to give you. You can only appeal to his sentiments; recall the duty and obedience he used to give you once upon a time. And don't think he hasn't considered these things for himself. When a man's thrown convention to the wind, and follows his own sweet way in the face of the world; nails his colors to the mast; you may be sure he's made a strong decision first. It may be a fool's decision, and some day he'll repent it—but that's the hardest decision to overcome. You don't suppose you can argue any stronger

than the man's own decency. If that's gone, what are you appealing to? Besides, he's weighed your wrath already, and counted the cost of it. If he'd stood in the least awe of your authority he would never have let this cat out of the bag. But she's out now, and there's no putting her back again. In fact, it looks to me as if he doesn't want her back. He's let her out on purpose—Lord knows what for. He may be thinking himself the apostle of a new liberty, for anything I know, or something equally heroic and ridiculous. I don't think it's depravity.'”

Mrs. Pendlip contributed an emphatic “I am very sure it is not. Very, very sure. He is more sinned against than sinning, Richard. I have a feeling that tells me——”

Pendlip did not wait to hear what it told. He was busy with Ronsome; recalling the discussion of the lunch table. That gentleman's imperturbable composure soothed and at the same time vexed him. It was counsel in the guise of a cryptogram; a thing like a doctor's prescription, whose authority seems the more absolute because incomprehensible and beyond challenge by the laity; and yet troubles the would-be decipherer to inquire what these inscrutable symbols are in which his well-being lies hid.

“I said to Ronsome,” Pendlip continued, with his pince-nez insecurely hooked on the fleshy prominence of his nose—where the glasses glinted at his words like the wings of a dragon-fly—“I said to Ronsome: ‘But, look here, Ronsome. If you were me, and the case were yours, what would you do?’”

“What was his answer?”

“It wasn't an answer. He told me: ‘Ah, my boy. You've got me there. Philosophy is only concerned with what other people ought to do.’ I put the whole

case before him: about Daisy, and our going to Spathorpe, and all the rest of it, and said: 'You know us. Ronsome. Can we possibly take the girl to Spathorpe after what's happened?' He said: 'Out of the question!' 'But it's arranged we're to join the fellow there next week,' I tell him. 'What's to be done meanwhile? We've got to write to him in any event. What's to be said? Are we to ignore the whole affair? You can't mean that.' He asked: 'Is he engaged to Daisy?' I answered: 'Not exactly.' He says: 'But is there any understanding?' I tell him: 'Well, it depends what you mean by understanding. Damme, there's nothing to laugh at, Ronsome. They were boy and girl together. He's seen more of her than anybody else that we know of. They're more like brother and sister.' 'Ah! that's the mistake of it,' says he. 'Many a time they've sat out in the garden after tennis,' I tell him, 'and Mrs. Pendlip expected to be told something before the night was over.'"

Mrs. Pendlip made a quick token of remonstrance.

"Richard! You never told James Ronsome that! You shouldn't have introduced my name in that way. It was unwise."

"Damme!" Pendlip ejaculated, "you can't deny you did. And Ronsome's a friend. He knows thirty years of our secrets. You can't expect counsel if you don't give confidence. They're not engaged—that's the truth of it. And there's no understanding that you or I could venture to suggest to Rupert. And as Ronsome says: 'That puts Daisy out of count.' We can't recall the fellow to any sense of obligation there. And then, he's right when he says that if once this question comes to an issue between us, there'll perhaps be blood warmed on both sides. We shall retire on our dignity, and

Rupert will stick to his independence, and probably keep as clear of Dulwich as he can, and by the time the whole thing has blown over we shall all be shy of one another, and have to start from the beginning again by being polite, like strangers. 'All that has got to be considered,' says Ronsome. And, of course, as he remarked, the thing itself isn't so dreadful, if it weren't so public. Boys will be boys."

Mrs. Pendlip pursed her lips into a reproving frill, and apostrophized her husband. "Richard! Don't tell me you countenance such a horrid thought as that. James Ronsome has no son or daughter to consider."

As a matter of fact, Pendlip's quotation of his friend was not quite *verbatim*. Ronsome did not say: "Boys will be boys," but "We've all been young in our day, Pendlip, and possibly a pretty woman could play the fool with a number of us even now, if she set her mind to it. The nuisance is, she doesn't try. I'm not going to quarrel with Rupert's taste, for Isabel Dysart is a fine woman, after all's said and done, and looks ten years younger than she must be. But that's not to say we're going to pawn our respectable gray hairs and hard-earned reputations to help youth out with its follies. If only the young beggar had been reasonably discreet I should have enjoyed taking supper with the two of them after the theater one night and hearing Isabel sing. Why, for the matter of that I think I did hear her sing, Pendlip, for I strolled quietly round by Cromwell Lodge after dinner and heard some one carolling like the lark over the garden wall. That's where I stopped and talked with the police sergeant, and let him dip his fingers in my cigar case in return for a little casual information."

All this, however—with the exception of Ronsome's

reconnaissance in person of Cromwell Lodge—Pendlip subjected to discreet revisal. He passed on to other parts of Ronsome's counsel.

"Ronsome talks about 'tact,' but when I ask him what he means by tact in this case, he tells me tact is easier to define than manage. Tact, he says, is like a fine violin, that requires a fiddler to play it—but what the deuce is the good of that sort of definition to me? Then he warns me: 'Above all, don't rush at the fellow and start slapping his head like a bad boy, just because somebody else—no better, perhaps, but a little older—has been telling tales about him. He's a grown-up man, remember, master of his own mind, money, and actions, and any respect he may show you now comes only out of the recollection of an old obedience you taught him, like a trick to a dog. Perhaps he's forgotten it altogether by now. Don't expect after this length of time he will rise at the first word of command. In fact, don't try to command him at all. No recriminations. No pious expostulations. No crumbs of outraged rectitude. No show of authority. No strong drugs, but the gentlest homœopathy for a case like this.'

"'Then you'd write to him?' I asked. 'If your mind's set on it,' he answered. 'My mind's set on nothing,' I tell him. 'So much the better,' says he. But in the end he asks: 'Why not run over to Spathorpe yourself, and see him? You needn't say what for. Give him a wire, if you like, just to prepare him—so that you can make sure of finding him disengaged. You don't want to blunder into the thick of it. Ask him to dine with you at the hotel and spy out the character of the land for yourself. If you see a favorable chance to speak, take it.' I asked: 'What do you call a favorable chance?' He said: 'Probably the second

bottle of Bollinger.' I tell him: 'Why the fellow hardly drinks at all.' 'That's rather a pity,' says he. 'Wine is so good for the conscience.' 'Is that what you'd do yourself, Ronsome?' I asked. 'I?' says Ronsome. 'Probably I might do far worse than that. Physicians prescribe badly for themselves. And as for interference with other people's affairs, why!—to tell the truth, Pendlip, I've seen so much of it in my time with disastrous results that I'm become a sceptic. I don't know whether a man's bad principles—so long as they're his own—aren't better for him than the best intentions devised by his friends. But that's for you to settle. I can't say. I haven't a marriageable daughter.'

"I'd a very good mind to go to Spathorpe," Pendlip remarked. "After all, it was Ronsome's idea. He said: 'Think it over. You'll see what I mean.' I could go to-morrow—take the luncheon train. Well, well, I say no more."

The idea gained on him; Mrs. Pendlip espoused it—though the agnostic influence of Ronsome plainly permeated both.

"Of course, be very careful what you say to him, Richard. Do nothing to anger him. You mustn't raise your voice as if it were politics. Don't have any words. Remember what James Ronsome told you and think of Daisy."

Pendlip resented the aspersion cast upon his voice. "Do you think I'm not to be trusted?"

His wife, the caution once given made haste to suck the venom from it, laying the emollient of flattery on the wound. Whom, indeed, could she trust better? Their boy was in safe hands, she knew. They prepared in quickened phrases the programme for the morrow. "You must give him our loves, Richard, our special loves, Daisy's and mine. Don't forget Daisy's."

Pendlip calculated trains, rehearsed himself in the prudent ritual of his purpose. "I'll put up at the Majestic. He shall dine with me there. It's just a run over for a breath of sea-air and a peep at him. That's what it is."

"Daisy has been thinking so much about him, lately," Mrs. Pendlip suggested.

"True, true. Daisy's been thinking so much about him lately. And we're a little uncertain whether the doctor will allow her to go to Spathorpe next week or not."

"The east coast is rather bleak, Richard. We're anxious about her chest."

"To be sure. Rather bleak. Anxious about her chest."

"Rupert will understand we must do nothing rash. Give him our loves, Richard. Of course, I told you that."

"And then—at dinner. Well, well—we shall see."

"Be sure and choose your opportunity. Daisy is stronger, tell him, but looking still very pale. She reads his letters over and over again, Richard. Don't forget that. They quite bring the color back to her cheeks. She opens them before any other. We often talk about him. Daisy asks: 'What will Rupert be doing now?' Illness has not made her forget him, say."

And so it continues. No word is to be said to Daisy. Her father's sudden journey shall not be made known to her until she rises on her late pillow next morning. Nor will her father's destination be Spathorpe, but some objective of more commercial significance. In contemplated action despondency goes. Their hopes revive. Pendlip says courageously he can but do his best. Mrs. Pendlip returns to her comfortable earlier hypothesis.

"Perhaps it is all a mistake, Richard. Such mistakes have happened before."

Pendlip says: "Pray Heaven it may be."

"Bring him back with you if you can, Richard," his wife bids him. "Don't leave the boy there. Anything may happen when once you're gone. This is his home, always his home. Don't fail to tell him that."

And if Daisy Pendlip were inclined to suspect her own fate in any way in the balance, or some momentous secret kept from her, she would find the legible signs in her mother's sudden intensification of kindness, or the difficulty with which she encountered or held her father's eye.

XXXVI

THE telegraph poles grew slower in their flight across the carriage window; the train threaded its more cautious way through a maze of switch-lines and points, a signalman, perched in the open window of his high cabin, leaned on elbow to watch it go by. There were signs on every hand that the sunlit fields and grassy slopes that had borne Pendlip smiling company throughout this latter portion of his journey were falling behind in this friendly race with the stronger, swifter sinews of steel and steam. A great green hill rose up on his right hand; swelling out of sight beyond the carriage roof. Pendlip had to stoop in his seat to see the summit, where a flag fluttered and three or four carriages rested motionless against the sky, and small microscopic mortals, that one might have rolled into oblivion between a finger and thumb, stood gazing down upon this little centipede of wood and iron that crawled around them at their base. Other carriages in various stages of ascension worked their slow way to the summit, that was darkened with foliage and bronze-green bracken, scorched beneath a summer of burning suns and hinting already the russet-ripeness of autumn.

At Pendlip's distance all sense of physical exertion seemed purged from the scene, leaving nothing but the clear delicious essence of pure motion and the steadfast blueness of an afternoon sky. Trees succeeded, sweeping the window-squares with whispering leafy branches, and dappling the hot carriage with cool

shadows of gold and green. Thereafter came prim privet hedges, and walls, yielding glimpses of torrid gardens and lawns baking in the sun, with indolent rollers cocked up on end to the sky, and cool serpentine coils of gutta-percha tubing, ready to refresh the parched herb at sundown. And after these, roofs rising tier over tier out of the valley at the rail-embankment's foot, and crowded chimney stacks; and distant domes unheaved slowly in dead beaten gold and burnished copper; and a spire or two, and a church tower with the hours struck in flame off its luminous clock target; and tremendous stars blazing to blindness on glass roofs and high windows; and here and there the fairy sheen of telephone wires looped from gable to gable like gossamer.

The elderly gentleman in the opposite corner of the compartment, who had kept revealing a vulcanite palate during moments of unguarded and unlovely slumber throughout the journey, wakened with a jerk, reclaimed the paper that had slipped off his knees every three minutes for the past half hour, and with a miraculous recovery of his faculties addressed himself to the collection of his belongings after a look through the window and a confirmative glance at his watch—being of the class of individuals that time trains as if they were pulses, and will express incomprehension to a whole carriageful of any cause that puts the timetable a few minutes to the bad, telling Pendlip: "We are running nearly punctual to-day, sir. Unusual for this line. I put my watch right with York this morning, by Greenwich." To which Pendlip, startled out of a reverie, returned: "Ha!"

Thereupon the gentleman consigned several books and a check traveling-cap to a brown dispatch case, and took Mr. Pendlip's umbrella into his own hands

under thoughtful consideration before appealing to him if he were the owner of it. Pendlip said hurriedly he was, and made himself its immediate possessor in fact, rising too, in turn, to give a prudent glance above his head to either rack and behind him on the cushions that were still warm, and bore the impress of his ample person. As he did so the train glided into the station, sloughing its sunlight like a skin beneath the screened dimness of smoked glass roofage, where steam billowed against the girders and the busy Westinghouse brake began to throb. Long lines of expectant faces slid by the carriage; whole parterres of them, row behind row, upturned to the passing windows. Here and there quick eyes caught sudden sight of what they looked for, and faces in the flower-bed blossomed into florid signals of recognition, but there was no countenance that Pendlip knew. The train, gathering leech-like porters to all its first-class doors, drew to a standstill and the faces closed in upon it; a typical sea-side throng in sweaters and flannels and flaunting summer raiment; tanned—or many of them—like pennies fresh from the mint; coined symbols of scorching days and fierce hot sand and briny waters and August idleness. Even above the smell of sweating mechanism and axle-grease, and stale steam there came to Pendlip, as the door opened, the unmistakable nip of ocean; the saline freshness of wide waters, with a redolence of the finny denizens that swim in them; the vigor of air cooled across miles of rolling sea, and made hot by reflection from dry and glittering sands; as air to the lungs what wine is to the body—and doubly so to this newcomer from the brick-kiln capital called London. Ah! but for the consciousness of his errand, how Richard Pendlip might have broadened his chest to make room for more of this invigorating element; drawn it in to the ultimate capacity of his

lungs, ready for genial expulsion in greeting to the Poet!
"Well, well, my boy! There you are at last! Glad to see you! Feeling fit, are you? That's right! Well, well——"

But now his lungs compressed material for no such salutation. Except in finance, where his immobile face served as a masked battery for figures, Richard Pendlip was no actor. Do what he would, he knew his greeting must be lukewarm; his tongue shunned, as with a conscience of its own, the simulated phrases. His eye even, shirked a recognition of the object of its search, knowing already that it could not kindle with the gladness expected of it, and only looked the bolder at the crowd with a gathering confidence that what it stood in awe of was not there. Yes. Nobody who watched this magnate step from his compartment with an obsequious porter half-obliterated behind the amplitude of him, would have suspected such a form to be the home of trumpety misgivings. And yet with every mile that removed him further from Ronsome and brought him nearer to his task, the store of Pendlip's confidence—that precious lubricant of action without which all human mechanism creaks and labors—had diminished, and the uphill gradient had seemed to steepen. Situations not seen as difficulties before detached themselves at nearer hand into independent problems of magnitude. Pendlip began to doubt his stomach for the enterprise, and wished, respecting not a few contingencies that rose one after the other like waves, imparting an up and down and very dubious motion to his mind, that he had put them first to Ronsome. For, by so much as we incline to the counsel of another, our own initiative lessens, and it is possible to find ourselves at last, as Pendlip did, in some unsatisfactory mid-position between independence and servitude; possessed of a mind that

neither acts for us nor for another, but serves two masters and betrays them both. If Pendlip fabricated one explanation of his visit during the course of his journey, he fabricated a score; he was as busy as a locksmith, making motives to fit the occasion, and still feared whichever key he ultimately used would stick in the turning and betray its manufacture. Nor even on descent at the Spathorpe station had he selected which should be employed; they jangled loosely in his mind, and he confided himself to Providence with an improvidence he would have condemned in an investor.

But no Poet's face embarrassed him. Other faces pressed past; other hands, to whom this stationary portly figure was but an obstacle, pulled at his sleeve for passage. He stood in a commotion of voluble humanity, rock-like, towering above all its flux, and his first thought was: "The fellow hasn't dared to come." The conviction lent grimness to his mind, and—if he would have confessed it—a measure of relief equivalent to that with which coerced courage learns that the dentist, after all, is not at home. Well, he had done his duty; he had faced the guns. If the Poet were too much occupied or too guilty to keep this appointment, the fault was none of Pendlip's.

And then, just as the pleated lips turned to renounce attendance and give directions to the porter, his eye—at the very moment of exercising its function least—showed him the face he almost hoped to miss. His careless gaze, left high and dry by the receding crowd, grounded on the shallows. Before he could refloat it, his stranded bark was signaled and a rocket fired from shore. Next moment the Poet's own sunburned hand was making the rope secure, claspings Pendlip's leg of mutton hand in his and shaking it with a fervor that seemed to know neither shame nor deception. If Pend-



“‘This is the little friend you have read so much about’”

lip's disquietude had magnified the ordeal of the encounter, this greeting, at least, put his apprehensions to rout. The Poet's first query, after his words of welcome, was for Daisy.

"How is she?"

Pendlip recalled, too late, the lingering cough and the bleak coast. In the spasm of the moment he could only think of the truth.

"Ever so much better. Gaining strength nicely."

"I was a little afraid at first——"

"Yes, yes——"

"And Mrs. Pendlip?"

"Thank you, thank you——"

"I'm awfully glad you've come——"

"Well, well, well——"

And then he saw that other face drawn forward, that he had been desperately trying to overlook all this while, and felt that other, softer, smaller hand placed within his own, and heard the fateful words that linked him indissolubly with all he had wished and striven to avoid.

"This is the little friend you have read so much about—Miss Dysart"—("Dysart? Ay! That was the name. James Ronsome had made no mistake!")—"who sent all those kind messages to Daisy. She has come down on purpose to meet you and make your acquaintance. Haven't you, Bella?"

From out of the mist of the girlish personality that Pendlip's vision sought to repel from, rather than admit to, his consciousness, he caught the sound of a soft "O my!" among other words his hearing wilfully rejected. The little hand, taken and liberated as briefly as might be, stirred in him the resentment for a compact gained by trickery.

He said: "Yes; yes——" and the face that reverted

to the Poet was harder, though to the Poet it only seemed more aged than when last seen, and gravity more habituated to it. He did not divine the expletive held behind the tightened lips. "Condemn the fellow!" Pendlip was saying to himself. "Is he so devoid of sense as this? What's he brought the girl here for? I didn't ask for her. Does he think to hoodwink me, or is he using her to stop my mouth? Good Lord! Now what would James Ronsome say to this?" The look he plunged into the boy's eyes was, despite his pledged policy, almost sword-like and severe. A guilty conscience must have flinched under the thrust of it, or shown retaliatory steel. "Am I then such a very big fool?" Pendlip's indignation seemed to challenge the Poet. "Am I? Come! A truce to dissimulation. Let us deal with the truth of things."

But yet, there showed no dissimulation about this face, so familiar to Pendlip's present sight and past remembrance. The boy looked back at him whom Pendlip had always known; frankness and friendliness welled up and overflowed his smiling eyes. Beneath that rapier-like thrust of scrutiny he never flinched. The olive brownness of his open cheek told of salt breezes and burning suns; of vice or hidden wisdom the countenance betrayed no trace. He stood with his arm slipped through the arm of the girl, as he had drawn her forward to Pendlip's notice, and interpreted her presence with a candor as unintelligible as it was clear.

"Bella knows almost as much about you," he told the older man, "as I know myself, and is ever so anxious to know more. I promised to tell her heaps of things if she would agree to take them like the new nurse, without a character. But no. She's such a girl for truth. So I said she'd better come and ask you all

about yourself in person. If there's any business to be discussed——"

"There is," Pendlip interposed, more hastily than discreetly.

"It can be left over awhile!" the Poet completed, laughingly. "Of course, you are coming back with us now. You will take tea with us. And after that you will dine with me."

"No, no——" Pendlip drew forth his watch, fingering it as though to suggest the pressure of time and affairs. "It's very good of you. Fact is—I never thought. I've ordered my room and dinner for two at the Majestic by wire. I want you to be my guest. There are several little matters"—for the life of him could he have said what little matters they were, at the moment—"to be discussed."

Go back with "us"! Take tea with "us"! What on earth did the fellow mean? How would James Ronsome have treated such audacity as that? The porter, at Pendlip's elbow, dangling the brown portmanteau from a limp arm, caught the owner's eye adroitly, and a swift responsive forefinger flew to his forehead.

"Kerridge, sir?"

"Carriage," Pendlip repeated. With a loose movement the man set off for the cab-rank, Pendlip's portmanteau buffeting the hollow of his knee. Pendlip said: "Well, well——" and directed an irresolute look at the Poet, half helpless, half inquiring. "Then you will dine with me?" he asked.

"Since you won't dine with me," the Poet answered.

"Well then——" said Pendlip, and the difficulty in his gaze renewed itself. He tried to make the glance convey a pointed insinuation for the Poet's company unat-

tended; a demand for privacy; but to the Poet this look showed no variation from the first—merely the abstracted gaze of a grave and elderly man.

“At least, we will drive with you,” the Poet suggested, “if you’ll have us.”

Pendlip, fuming impotently within, said: “To be sure.” Had Bella taken leave of them at that moment, his remonstrance must have broken forth, Ronsome or no Ronsome; despite his pledges, wife and daughter. But the girl’s attention, small and meek but curiously close, wandered all over him, he knew, like a fly upon a ceiling, and with an eye hundredfold in power of perceptiveness. He gathered up the corners of his lips and passed with his companions to the waiting landau; an open vehicle of the old Spathorpe régime, driven by an ancient marine-looking gentleman with a crimson visage, who appeared as if he might have come out of a lobster pot. In this relic of decayed gentility Pendlip took his submissive place, breathing as if he had reached it by a flight of stairs. Mrs. Dysart’s undesirable daughter sat by his side; indeed, had the man but known it he was seated on part of her frock. Bella tried to release it once, but dared make no second attempt lest she should draw Pendlip’s attention to the situation and disturb him into ruffled apologies, which above all Bella dreaded from so august a personage. The Poet faced them both, with his back to the lobster and the jaded horse.

XXXVII

AT first Pendlip professed interest in all things over the carriage wheel to the exclusion of the two other occupants. But as they drove out of the dim sanctuary of the station into the sunlit openness of Spathorpe, his gaze shortened its area, and shrunk abashed from the odious publicity in which he felt himself paraded. For Richard Pendlip held fast by the public proprieties, and sat as wretched in this false position as he would have done in a Labor Member's carriage, drawn by cheering socialists, with a red rosette pinned to his lapel. Every face that looked his way burned like the sun above. Shadrack, Meshack and Abed-nego, that historic trinity of fire-eaters, felt less scorch from Nebuchadnezzar's furnace than Pendlip, dragged unwilling through these consuming flames of notice. His indignation condemned himself and his ill-considered telegram of the morning. "Why did I wire the fellow! I might have known by what Ronsome told me he would do something senseless. If I'd merely asked him to dine with me at the hotel he couldn't have let me in for a thing like this. What will people think of me! At my age."

Yet here was the author of his wretchedness, his boy's smiling face thrust forward, chattering into Pendlip's wandering ear as if their progress were a pleasure drive; implicating the girl's voice, too, and forcing Pendlip out of his protective abstraction into the free exchange of words. And such is the instinct of human

nature for companionship that Pendlip even found this conversation in the carriage more supportable than the stares awaiting him beyond, and took refuge with the very causes of his discomfort from the publicity his uneasiness imagined they drew upon him. So, rather than expose his face to the causeways—that to his uneasy conscience teemed with observant Ronsomes—he leaned forward in the carriage, and being forced to give some countenance to the presence of the undesired passenger, discovered Isabel Dysart's daughter to be, as his own mind phrased it, "an exceedingly attractive girl." Nay, more than this. Each time Richard Pendlip paid his youthful companion the compliment of a look at her gray eyes, the resentment in him at once died down; something akin to pity took its place. For Pendlip, despite his gray side-whiskers and financial lip, was not blind to beauty, and had the vanity to think beauty was not altogether blind to him. When Ronsome reminded him that each was one time young, he spoke the truth, whatever else the saying might impute. Pendlip's severe profile was as susceptible to the melting blandishments of a pretty woman as the Poet's own; and the older man flattered himself on his power to be popular with youth. At the third look at this gentle figure of girlhood, on whose imprisoned skirt unwittingly he sat, Pendlip's heart grew lenient. Justice stirred in him. An internal voice argued: "After all. What has this poor child to do with it? Why make her innocence suffer with the guilty?" The soft insistence of her gaze, always on his face, and very searching, yet mild as April sunshine when looked at, made an appeal to his pride. "I don't want her to think me an old curmudgeon," his soul confessed. "Damme, I'm not that yet. This drive is none of her doing. I've no quarrel with her. Heaven help her, she's only a child

now, whatever she may come to be. And after all, she sent her love to us, and I've taken it, and sent ours back. Even James Ronsome wouldn't expect me to act the beast."

Nor did he. Once his mind drew its definite division between Bella Dysart and the faults with which, like him, she was so innocently confounded, his reticence thawed. She saw a new Pendlip in place of the old, and thought, perhaps, the earlier figure had been shy. Even to the Poet it seemed the Spathorpe sun began appreciably to warm his former guardian's heart, and in his more expansive smiles perceived the effect of these pleasant surroundings and potent air. Pendlip, like all men pledged to a task disliked, was glad to cry truce with what oppressed him, recovering wonderfully in spirit the moment it was proclaimed, and knew the opposing forces were dehostilized till dinner. And though he tried to keep his friendliness free of hypocrisy, and his laughter of all that could (by later light) be viewed as guile, he did his best to be himself, and act toward the delinquent as the delinquent did to him, and to the girl as her age and sex and gentleness demanded.

True, as they drew up before the gilded façade of the Majestic, Pendlip's apprehensions shrunk beneath something of the former constraint. He would have heaved a sigh of deliverance here, had this favored part of Spathorpe shown less sun and animation, but he noted with dismay the rows of merciless cigars upon the spacious steps, the range of wicker-chairs buried beneath feminine flounces, receding into the welcome dimness of the domed vestibule; the stream of curious people that slackened visibly as the landau came to a standstill, and he drew his breath at the necessity to run the gauntlet of so many eyes, fearing to look to

right or left lest an imprudent glance might betray the presence of some odious acquaintance. Here, if anywhere, since there was no withdrawal, the girl furnished a welcome foil to his feelings; his eye had in her a shield, his lips a buckler. As the landau grated its forewheel against the curb, and the resplendent porters ran nimbly down the hotel steps, Bella was busy with confidences and interrogations, the warmth of her fingers penetrating through Pendlip's knee, where her hand had tumbled in the interest of the conversation. "O my!" she exclaimed, with a touch of regret for the conclusion of so brief a journey, "Here we are! It's a beautiful hotel—isn't it!—from the outside. Of course, I've never been inside. I've only peeped up the steps and wondered."

It would have taken a sterner man than Richard Pendlip to tread this gentle daisy of suggestion underfoot. Besides, there was nothing now to be lost or gained before the sight of all these people. The ill—if ill there were—was wrought already. And Bella's charm had worked upon him. Beauty and a soft tongue and yearning eyes and the tenderness of youth had softened him and roused his affections. Despite all surrounding her and implicating himself, Pendlip liked the girl, and where there is true liking, a man inclines to be reckless.

"Well," he told her genially. "And so now you're coming inside to see for yourself, aren't you?"

"Am I?" cried Bella joyously. "O my! I should love it. Thank you ever so much. Oh, Roo! Did you hear! Mr. Pendlip's invited me inside!"

At the bureau Pendlip inquired the number of his rooms from a tired pretty girl, who looked as if she had worn out her energies at a ball the night before. She rose wearily from some writing at an inner desk, and

turned some papers with a lifeless hand that might never have known any warmer response than the pressure of her own pen. There was ink on the forefinger that strayed languidly over the entries, and a little on her lip.

"Pendlip?" she read out interrogatively. Pendlip acknowledged the name. "Sitting-room and bedroom booked by wire this morning? Dinner for two at eight o'clock? Private service? Thank you. Forty-four and forty-five." And she passed him the visitors' book to sign. "Send up tea in ten minutes," Pendlip told her. The tired girl scanned his signature unemotionally, and blotted it. "Tea for three?" she inquired, looking over Pendlip's shoulder with automatic calculation. Pendlip turned on his heel in swift inquiry. "Of course, of course," he said, as though the question called for no dispute; to the window adding a conclusive "Thank you."

And this is how Bella Dysart came to take tea as she had so dearly desired with the august Mr. Pendlip, in a big private sitting-room of the Majestic, overlooking the bay; a wondrous high sitting-room, perched—or so it seemed—half way up to the sun, with a balcony (could loyalty but admit it) more amazing than the Poet's own, that conferred upon the courageous beholder from it, a thrilling sense of sheerness and precipitous insecurity, as if—out here—one were upheld by nothing but the tender mercy of infinite Heaven. So perilously perched, indeed, that when one wanted to show one's friends where one lived with one's mamma, one had to hold tight to the iron balustrade with one hand while one pointed with the other; though, after a little practice and familiarity, one knew for certain that one would have the courage to run in and out between the big round room and blue immensity as if one were bred

to altitude and the elements like a bird. In this room they shared a glorious repast, with special cakes and sweetnesss for Bella—for though the leonine Pendlip in his own home turned confectioner's trumpery over with a critical and supercilious finger, inquiring: "What's this? What do you call these?" and always ultimately served himself to bread and butter, he flattered his heart he knew the ways and tastes of young ladies, and called to the white-faced waiter as he was about to take his leave: "No, no. Stop a moment. Hello! Psst! Let's have something sweet and insubstantial as well; something for a young lady; chocolate cake or meringues, if you've got 'em."

And tea (partaken in private, apart from curious and complicating eyes) assumed almost the character of a birthday party. When Pendlip—grown nearly back into his external self once more, now there was no gaze of outraged propriety to be feared—uttered at length the well-known phrase that Bella had been waiting for so vigilantly, she could not restrain herself, but cried in triumph to the Poet: "O my! He's said it now, hasn't he!" turning next as horrified a crimson as the cherry plums in the fruit cake, while the Poet shook with laughter.

"Said what?" inquired Pendlip, perplexed, but smiling too.

"Only a little joke of our own," the Poet answered. "I'll tell you later." And indeed he meant to do, but that more serious matters interposed, and the cause of Bella's coloration and his own laughter was never divulged.

And then, after one farewell experience of the wonder of the window, the Poet and Bella took their leave; Bella full of gratitude and affection, and not now in the least fear of this figure of masculine majesty.

"Good-by," she said, before Pendlip's own bow-fronted presence. "But no. Of course it's not good-by. I shall see you again to-morrow, shan't I!"

The question resurrected all the host of Pendlip's buried difficulties. The finality of this meeting stood spectrally revealed. His mouth accumulated creases.

"I'm afraid," he began. Bella's eye grew round and serious. The Poet cut into Pendlip's sentence. "What—you don't mean to say you're going?"

"I fear so," Pendlip answered. "Must get back to town to-morrow."

Bella emitted the most mournful "O my!" The Poet plunged into friendly expostulation. "But you can't. You mustn't——"

"He must see mamma first, mustn't he!" cried Bella.

It was scarcely, perhaps, what the Poet had intended. He did not take up the suggestion with promptitude, and Pendlip, who winced at it, drew an omen from the sign. "Well, well," said he, and put an end to the discussion with a suggestion of infinality. "We'll see. We can talk about that later. You'll be here at eight?" The Poet assured him: "With pleasure." Bella still stood before the portly form, her brow on a level with the gold watch-chain. Again Pendlip took her little hand in his, and said: "Good-by." She breathed a wistful "Good-by" in return, and pleaded: "You won't go away to-morrow, will you!" Pendlip smiled: "Oh, well, well, well!" And then, misinterpreting a movement of his, the girl lifted up a frank smooth cheek, browner now than when the Poet first beheld it. Only for an instant did Pendlip debate whether to acknowledge or ignore the action. Then he lowered his towering shoulders and did the man. Bella put both her arms around the neck inclined to her, and kissed with a vehement affection that surprised the recipient. For

some reason best known to inscrutable Providence or the wisdom of our mother Nature—certainly not clearly to Pendlip's self—the act produced an uncomfortable sensation behind his eyelids as if perhaps—though he hoped not—in the course of his journey some engine-grit had lodged in them. He said: "There, there," and patted paternally the girl's shoulder with his broad hand, and did not look at the Poet when she let go her hold of him.

And when his guests were gone, he tucked his hands under his coat behind him, and confronted the window for quite five minutes; staring out upon a scene of soft and glowing enchantment, without registering an item of its beauty; pondering these things that had come to pass and the unknown things to come. His eyeglasses balanced on his nose like an apothecary's scales; one eyebrow pushed a range of furrows up to his temple; the other made a lowering shade for the eye beneath; his underlip protruded like a tongue. He did not look lovely, but superlatively thoughtful. "What's a man to make of it?" he asked himself at last. "Is the whole business smoke? Damme, if it wasn't for James Ronsome, I could almost believe that Rachel's right."

XXXVIII

BARELY two hours later, in the same room, the Poet destroyed with ruthless hand the white bishop's miter marking his place at table, and drew the napkin across his knees in obdurate starched squareness. Pendlip, adjusting himself to his complete satisfaction in the chair opposite, with one eye on the menu and the other on the wine-list, called out to the Poet for his choice in liqueurs, and held mysterious colloquy with the white-faced waiter, stooping to the gentleman's left ear with a respectful knuckle on the table corner, and pointing out the significances of the wine-list with a hand clasped about a serviette. Each word of Pendlip's drew him down to the patron's ear, bending him from the waist as if he worked by means of bell-wire. Whatever he had to say, issued from him more like breath than voice; he seemed to serve a mourner, whose recent sorrow must be spared unnecessary speech. At each order he flicked the corner of the table with his napkin before returning to the perpendicular once more, and melted from sight on errands like spring snow. In the room itself he heard nothing but what was directly addressed to him, when a whisper sufficed; keeping his eye expertly from collision with the glances of those he served; obedient to the fundamentals of his calling, that a waiter's eye should see all but be seen by none. Otherwise—if a waiter may be admitted a fitting subject for speculation—he bore the semblance of a married man to whom domestic suffering was not

unknown, and the hand that poured the foaming drink of Dionysus into Pendlip's cup, was not without a careworn look about its veins, as if it knew to nurse and chastise youth, and even propel the doleful bassinet.

The meal ran its course comfortably enough. The intellectual pace was easy; a child might have kept up with it. The fire of conversation was mainly fed by small coal. Pendlip told the tale about Dr. Johnson and the leg of mutton, that the Poet first laughed at when he came home from his first term at school, and recalled a dozen occasions when Pendlip had told it better. For the older man did not desire too big a blaze at present, at which to warm the palms of friendship, lest under influence of its comfortable flame duty might find her task too hard. Each smile shared with the Poet now, seemed to Pendlip's super-conscience base; each jest at heart a traitor. For, every laugh contributed to Pendlip's trouble and perplexity, and lent the force of a further falsehood to the mounting score of the Poet's deception. When Pendlip reminded himself that all this dissimulating edifice of their meal must ere long be demolished, and reduced to débris, he grew abstracted, and applied the wine-glass nervously to his lips. He had an uneasy consciousness of taking advantage of the boy; decoying him thus with a feigned fair face into the meshes of the nest spread for him, and wished now he had been frank enough to speak at first and had not made the difficulties of both sides harder by protraction. Time and again, profiting by the waiter's absence, he had it on the tip of his tongue to blurt out his confession and be done with it: "Look here, my boy," and so on to "Well, well, I say no more." But on each occasion—in the face of an impulse so strong that it shook the wine-glass lifted in preface to what should follow, he let himself be diverted

by the most trivial word or action on the Poet's part. His purpose seemed imbued with the quality of a sunbeam, that can travel millions of miles and in the end be turned and thwarted by a mirror.

Here, at such close quarters, all Ronsome's philosophy was confounded. This rumor, so reasonable in London, showed incredible at Spathorpe—for all he could not doubt the truth of it. He looked and marveled at the Poet's blameless face, seeking in vain over that unblemished countenance for some visible grub-hole to mark the evil at the Poet's core. And by that very reason his tongue seemed tied. He feared to cast the first stone at such a surface of plate-glass hypocrisy, for what should follow; the crash; the awful ruination and collapse of all this smiling frontage; the stammerings; the expostulations; the lies and falsehoods, even, reared up in temporary barricade to screen the assailed from the assailant, and doing that irreparable damage against which James Ronsome had warned him. So the courses passed by.

They talked of Mrs. Pendlip and of Daisy. The Poet, with a frankness that lent embarrassment to the task before his host, sang full-throatedly his Spathorpe days and doings. All, that is, save one—and that one Richard Pendlip grimly noted. The name Bella came frequently upon the Poet's lips, but that other—though they spoke her once or twice without emphasis—passed through his discourse chiefly under cover of the plural pronoun, shading her like a parasol. "We," did this or that; "we," went here or there. Occasionally, as a matter of differentiation, though unexplained, the Poet made use of the qualifying "all," to express Mrs. Dysart's presence. "We all went to the theater," "We all took tea at Wehrli's." But of any more elaborate allusion to Mrs. Dysart there was none. The signifi-

cance of the silence pricked Pendlip like a pin, confirming his worst fears. "Ronsome's right. Rachel's wrong," he told himself, when Mrs. Dysart passed ominously in the plural. And then, perhaps, some outburst of laughter on the Poet's part, some open reference to Cromwell Lodge and Bella, caused him to shape a perplexed "Damme, I can't make the fellow out a bit. Is it Ronsome or Rachel, after all?"

Cheese and dessert gave way to the graceful fragrance of coffee. Pendlip lit his cigar. The white-faced waiter waftily withdrew. They toyed with the stems of their liqueur glasses. There came a lull in the conversation; a gap between words, widening precipitously, and Pendlip saw before him an abyss. Whose bosom holds a secret dreads silence most of all, for at such a moment mere thoughts acquire voices and seem to shout from the brain. Pendlip's head ran full of them. He coughed a wanton cough, feigning its cause in the smoke of his cigar. Once or twice during the meal the Poet had looked at him with a face of sudden inquiry, hastily parried. All at once the look framed itself anew, and gathered to a head of speech: "By the way—" It was the crisis. This time Pendlip knew his hour was at hand. He tightened his lips over the cigar, and the end of it glowed red-hot to his long-drawn inhalation. His eye converged to the fiery center beyond his nose. After awhile he approached two fingers circuitously to his lips and transferred the Havana to their fork. A volume of liberated smoke poured out in pursuit of it.

"By the way—did you say there was some business to discuss?"

Pendlip knocked the ashen head of his cigar against the coffee-saucer. "I did."

He had not wished his words terse; had tried, in-

deed, to utter them with a reflection of the Poet's smile, but despite intention they left his lips divorced from the geniality he meant to incorporate with them. No helpful glimmer of intelligence shone in the Poet's face. The smile was still the boy's smile, as much friendly as inquiring.

Still, when Pendlip sucked deliberately at his cigar again, he asked: "What business is it?" Pendlip lowered the cigar and looked at him a moment.

"Can you guess?"

The Poet shook his head. "I'm no good at guessing. Is it Hewitson's?"

Pendlip thought: "Is it ignorance or obstinacy?" Aloud he said: "No, no. It's not Hewitson, James and Company. (I fancy we shall see an improvement in their next half-year's account. The last lock-out did them a lot of harm. These trades-unions are the devil.) No, it's not Hewitson, James and Company." He paused.

The Poet said to himself: "Why, this preamble? What business is it?" And then his old hypothesis of the telegram flashed back upon him. "It can't be——" Aloud, his words differed from his thoughts to the same extent as Pendlip's.

"Anything important?" he asked carelessly.

"If I had not thought so, I should not be here."

"You came on purpose for that?"

"Largely. Partly. That and other things. That principally. Yes. That—since you ask me." Thoughts of Ronsome and his wife Rachel rendered Pendlip's policy unsteady.

The Poet subscribed: "Oh," and after a moment: "Tell me what it is."

"You have no idea?"

"Not the least." But to his conscience he admitted

the falsehood here. He said to himself incredulously: "By gad! It's that after all," and by consequence displayed more carelessness and less perception. And yet his acting must have been creditable, for Pendlip—gaining courage through this procrastination—scrutinized the boy keenly across his cigar, and said to himself: "I believe he hasn't. Is Rachel going to be right, after all?"

"You'll acquit me of interference, I hope, my boy," he said.

The Poet responded with an immediate "Certainly, sir," employing the old title of respect to mark acknowledgment of Pendlip's authority and assure him of a deference still owed and cheerfully subscribed. "There's nobody with a better right to speak to me than you. As for interference, the word doesn't exist for me where you are concerned. Don't hesitate to say whatever you may have to say." To himself he added: "What the hangment is it going to be?"

"Why, true, true," Pendlip acknowledged, mollified by the boy's tribute, coming thus on the top of suspicions and champagne. "Perhaps you may tell me it's not my business. Well, well, perhaps it isn't. But I speak only for your good. Everybody's business is anybody's business, and when it comes to anybody's business I think it's as much my business as another's. I can't keep silence when everybody else is talking."

This time, thought he, the fellow surely cannot fail to blink with this flash of truthfulness in his eyes. "*Now* do you understand what business I allude to?" he demanded.

The Poet answered: "No better than before." It is true his smile had left him now, but not his facial sincerity. "Unless you mean that people are talking about me?"

Pendlip answered briefly: "They are."

"I don't understand what in the world they can have to say."

"For one thing . . ."

"Yes."

"They say your friendships are not discreet."

"Which friendships?"

"Your Spathorpe friendships."

"I have but one."

"That is the one."

"What! Bella Dysart?" He knew and recognized his slight deception in tendering first the name he was sure would be rejected.

"I mean her mother."

"Mrs. Dysart?"

"Yes."

"Oh!" The word was not so much an interjection as a momentary resting place for the voice. The Poet's smile came back with it, less open than before, as if it wrapped a slightly bitter kernel. "I did not think I was of so much interest to everybody."

Pendlip said: "Damme, Rupert. People have eyes and tongues. The world must see and talk." He thought of Ronsome. "Remember, boy, I have not come here to abuse you. I bring no recriminations, no expostulations, no show of authority. You are your own master. Boys will be boys. I've been a boy myself." (The Poet thought: "When?") "But I can't hear what I have heard and give no warning. I'd rather you should blame me for overstepping my duty than neglecting it."

"And what have you heard?"

"What was I likely to hear?"

"Heaven knows."

"Come!" said Pendlip, disturbed by this blank ob-

tuseness on the Poet's part. "Let's be open with one another. You can't deny you are always with this woman."

"'This woman'? Is that what Everybody calls her?"

"It is."

"And who is Everybody. He has a name. What is it?"

"That doesn't matter."

"To me it matters a great deal. Everybody may prove to be no friend of mine."

"On the contrary, the Everybody in question is a friend of yours."

"Very well—if you don't care to trust me. I suppose you were told in confidence. That is the weapon friends chiefly make use of to stab one another."

Pendlip demurred: "No stabbing, Rupert, no stabbing at all. You misjudge the motive. It was Ronsome told me, if you must know."

"Ronsome?"

"Yes."

"You surprise me. How does Ronsome come into the business?"

"He has been in Spathorpe."

"Recently?"

"The past week-end."

"And saw me?"

"Frequently."

"And never spoke! Never declared himself!"

"Well, well. I don't blame him. After all, Rupert, you could scarcely expect it."

"Scarcely expect it? Why in the world not? What has Ronsome done that he thinks I have cause to be ashamed of him?"

"Look here, Rupert. All the years I knew you as a boy, you never once told me a falsehood."

The Poet broke in: "Yes I did. Twice at least, to my remembrance. Probably more."

Pendlip said, "Well, well. Twice. That's not what I mean. That's nothing. I mean as a general thing. Come now, on your honor, boy. Is this thing true or false?"

"Is what thing true or false?"

"The thing people say about you. Is it true you are keeping this woman?"

Now, for the first time, Pendlip saw the unmistakable consequences of enlightenment. Whether his shaft pierced innocence or guilt, there was no doubt the head was struck well home. The smile drained imperceptibly from the Poet's lips, leaving only its conformation behind. So this, he told himself incredulously, was the conundrum solved at last; the cause at the back of Pendlip's telegram. He had scarcely bargained for a blow so blunt. For awhile, with the square impress on his forehead, he could only stare at the administrator of it.

"Is that what they say?"

"Yes." There came a pause. "Well. You don't deny it?"

"Is it necessary to deny it?"

"Not unless—not unless—" He sought refuge in appeal. "Don't tell me it's true, Rupert."

"Absolutely false."

Pendlip looked at the boy and drew a long breath of relief. Rachel was right, after all. What news for her!

"Thank God!"

"What for?"

"Because it's untrue."

"I see no reason to thank God for a falsehood."

"Well, well—perhaps not. I am no theologian."

"Ronsome knew this when he was in Spathorpe last week? And never spoke! I see, I was the disreputable fox-terrier of a friend, on the loose miles away from home, and he was afraid I might attach myself to his heels. Is that it? Still, I think he might have given me a word."

"If Ronsome had thought there was a word to give," Pendlip took up, "he would have given it, Rupert, you may be sure. But Ronsome thought— Why, confound it, boy! What *could* he think? He thought what everybody else thought. You made no secret of it. You were always with her. And then—her reputation, too. You know what she is."

"What she is!" the Poet repeated, with a sudden contraction of his brows. "What do you mean? What is she?"

Pendlip, who had been balancing his pince-nez with a judicial right hand, slipped the glasses on his nose and peered over them in astonishment.

"Surely—you don't need to ask that!"

"On the contrary, I do need to ask it. Mrs. Dysart is a lady. I know that. What else does Everybody say she is?"

"Good Lord!" cried Pendlip, spilling the neglected cigar ash over his shirt front. "It's incredible. Do you tell me you've been making a friend of the woman all this time without knowing a word about her! Haven't you been horribly indiscreet? You know what sort of people come to Spathorpe in the season, and yet you go and pick a woman up without inquiry, and let her play ducks and drakes with your name!" He saw the growing tension of the Poet's face, and broke

off suddenly to beg: "Forgive me, boy. It's not anger, but zeal. Your good name is as much to me as my own. Mrs. Dysart—well, well. I say no more. You know what she is. She's a woman of easy morals."

"Who told you this about her? Ronsome?" The Poet's voice betrayed a certain hardening due to control.

"Ronsome told me. Yes."

"Where did Ronsome get it from?"

"Everybody. I fear the thing's only too true, Rupert."

"As true about her as the other story about me?"

"Yes. Yes. But the woman's known. Her character's common property. Ronsome's spoken to half a dozen men about her. They all tell him the same. There's no denying it. Damme, Rupert, did you see nothing? Do you mean you never even had a suspicion? You've passed hours alone with her. If I believe your innocence, who else is there that will? Who's her husband? What is he, and where is he? Who are her people? Who are her friends? What's she doing at Spathorpe with nobody but her daughter? Why, surely, boy, the thing's as palpable as this cigar."

Ay! It was palpable enough presented thus. All these questions were questions that had troubled spectrally the Poet's mind, and been laid by the kind of faith whose sacrament is Beauty; or, if not laid, raised at least into pious mysteries, articles of faith to doubt or question which partook of heresy. A score of truths were lit up in the Poet's understanding like the gas-jets on the Parade, leaking invisibly through a thousand ready burners, that catch communicating light from a single flame and string a necklet of fire around the terrace. Words, looks, gestures, blazed with a new significance, touched by Pendlip's smoking torch. And if the

Poet still displayed his rapier, and contested truth with the point of it, he fought through loyalty and not conviction of the rightness of the cause, as men before have brandished arms for a worthless king. Pendlip's voice, heard and automatically answered, reached him through a whole cloud of his own reflections; the smoke from a mind in sudden conflagration.

"The wife of an army man," he heard Pendlip tell him. "Heaven knows what's got him now. Ronsome has been told he's in the Argentine. Believes he wasn't the least factor in the woman's present life—made use of her to propitiate his creditors, and engage the attentions of dishonorable friends who had it in their power to make his fortune, and squandered more money than ever he had, and hers too, upon the Stock Exchange. Ronsome knew something of Dysart's family at one time. Says they were all painted with the same brush. There was a divorce case too, about ten years ago. Ronsome remembers it. Dysart got a decree *nisi*, but it wasn't made absolute. There was collusion with his wife and the co-respondent, or something. The Proctor intervened. Oh! a clever, unprincipled woman. You've been thoroughly deceived, my lad. Well, well, I say no more. Thank God, it's no worse. Let this be a lesson to you."

XXXIX

BUT for the Poet wider issues were at stake than the rectification of a slander, or the re-adjustment of a matter of morals, or the mere restoration of a torn character. There were things he could not explain to Pendlip; things he could not discuss. He needed respite now, and privacy where he could sort and rearrange his thoughts, free of influence or interruption. Grateful though he felt toward the elder man for this timely action, he sought to escape his admonitory voice, as a sailor draws off from the dirge-like bell-buoy that has warned him.

The Poet's perplexity drew no counsel from Pendlip's crude materializing of the situation into one of mere fact and substance; seeing in this tangle of fine soul-threads no more than a cord-knot to be cut with a knife. "Of course, you won't stay any longer here. Now that the woman's unmasked you'll leave Spathorpe at once. The sooner the better. Come back to Dulwich with me. I want to catch the luncheon train to-morrow morning. We can travel together. Eh? What? You will?"

The Poet said: "I can't say. Very likely I will. I'll think it over."

"Think it over!" Pendlip exclaimed, with a glance of unmitigated misgiving. "Why, what is there to think over? You can't stay where you are, after this. The sooner you're out of Spathorpe the better for all parties. You don't mean——"

"Just at the moment I mean nothing," the Poet made answer. "But this has been—well, a little bit sudden for me. I want to get accustomed to it. That's all."

"Accustomed to it!" Pendlip repeated in visible consternation. "What! Accustomed to a thing like this! Why, you ought to be indignant at it. I'd like to see you more indignant than you are. You're not going at once!" Pendlip protested, for the boy had risen. "Come. Sit down again. There's plenty of time. It's not ten o'clock. Let's talk the business over."

The Poet stood his ground. "If you don't mind, I think I'd rather go. I don't feel much like talking, to-night——" Now that the inevitable bomb was burst, and the damage done, he had no stomach to conduct Pendlip over the ruins in order that curiosity might peer at Mrs. Dysart and her daughter through these wrecked and devastated walls. It wounded him to share with any other the sight of the altered circumstances of his friends; to hear them spoken of in terms of slight or pity, that he could not resist, and yet which to countenance seemed like betrayal of them and treachery to his self-esteem. He held out his hand. Pendlip saw purpose not to be dissuaded, and gripped it warmly.

"Well, well!" he said, "If you won't really stay—I hope I've only done my duty. Believe me that was the only thing that brought me here; the only thing I aim to do."

The Poet answered: "I am very sure of that."

"Why then, I say no more," Pendlip returned. "You know me. Richard Pendlip's no stranger to you; you're no stranger to him. We've done our duty and said our say, and there's no bad blood betwixt us."

At this moment of premature leave-taking, his mind

cast hurriedly on all sides to collect and redeem the pledges given to his wife and Ronsome; anxious no undertaking or instruction should be found missing from the scroll of his achievement when the mental roll-call came.

"I gave you Mrs. Pendlip's love, my boy? Yes, yes. And Daisy's? To be sure. I wasn't to forget Daisy's? Of course—she knows nothing at all of this, Rupert. Not a word. It will never be alluded to. Make your mind easy on that score. You may trust us implicitly, my boy!"

He would have liked to interpolate one of his wife's suggestive phrases illustrating the degree of the girl's attachment: "She is devoted to you, Rupert. Wouldn't believe a single wrong word of you. Yours is the first letter she looks for in the morning. I mustn't tell you how many times it's read during the day." But his courage stuck at this; moreover, he had the sense to realize how far away this daughter was from the Poet's mind at the moment. In place of what he would have said, and did not, he wrung the Poet's hand, suggesting every species of friendship and sincerity, sympathy, commiseration, pride and hope; ringing interminable. "Well-well's" from his massive head, as if he were the noble draught-horse in a bell cart.

"Mrs. Pendlip said I was to be sure and bring you back with me, my boy. We mustn't disappoint her. She's stuck up for you from the first. Said it was all a mistake, and she knew you better than James Ronsome, that never nursed a baby in his life, or washed anybody's face but his own. Well, well! Thank goodness she's right. Come back with me and tell her so yourself, Rupert. Grayhurst is always your home, boy. Grayhurst is always your home. That's Mrs. Pendlip's message—one of 'em—I was to be sure and give you

that." He clung tenaciously to the Poet's hand, reluctant to let go his tenure lest some point of policy might still be better urged, or some ampler compliance on the Poet's part persuaded.

"Well, well. Till to-morrow. I'd like to catch the luncheon train. If you can't be ready, I'll wait. What time will you see me in the morning?"

He elicited no answer of the sort he wanted. The Poet only said: "I'll see. I'll let you know. Thank you for all your care and trouble. I think you'll know how grateful I am, even if I don't show it very well. I'm sorry to have brought you over on a business like this."

The hand, long held, had to be relinquished at last. Pendlip walked with him to the door, and returned with the gnawing consciousness of a task but incompletely done. Something in the Poet's demeanor dissatisfied him; the more so as the more he thought upon it. Suspicions, for awhile torpid, became alive again; a writhing scorpionic brood. He went back to his apartment and surveyed over dubious glasses these relics of a dismal feast, multiplying well-well's in his mind, and prolonging the interview with words infinitely more purposeful and more wise than any he could console himself with having uttered. Wisdom seemed alight in him. Now that the Poet was gone, his brain was irradiated with it. Confidence began to quaver. He succumbed to self-reproach.

"Why didn't I keep him longer? 'No, no! I insist, boy. Let's have this matter settled before you go. I have a right to ask it of you. You owe me something. If this report's all wrong, prove it. Give me a token. Say you'll leave Spathorpe to-morrow. If you aren't willing to do that—be damned to these protestations.'"

He went to the window and peered out upon the glittering array of lights as if his desires sought to find the Poet in their flickering company, and trace his footsteps.

"Where's he going now? Why didn't I get his word he wouldn't see her. Not ten o'clock yet. What on earth does he mean to do with his time? He can't be going to bed. That's not Rupert's way!

"What's the name of the house? By Jove! I've a good mind—James Ronsome did it. It would serve the fellow right if he's been deceiving me.

"All this time, and vows he never tumbled to it! A woman who has only her beauty to live on! Am I to believe that? Would James Ronsome believe that? Would anybody believe that? He swore he wasn't financing her. Ay! But how far has it gone in other directions? How far was it meant to go? Has she been playing the fine lady to him, and fooling the fellow with a whole pack of lies and false pretences? Surely he hasn't been taking her seriously! Damme, I should have asked him. 'Look here, my boy. On your word now. How far have you got with her? What's your footing?'

"It can't be"—the thought dismayed him—"it can't be he didn't know until I told him that this woman's in the market, and now has half a mind to go and bid for her! 'Think it over!' Why! What else is there to think over? 'Think it over'—when he knows what she is! Why! I believe he's capable of it, too. He's told me nothing. I know as little now as when I came."

Thus, pacing his apartment from wall to wall Richard Pendlip argued his way back to pessimism, smoldering and self-reproachful, and anticipating little from the morrow.

"A letter!" he decided to himself. "Depend upon it. That's all I shall get for my pains. 'Sorry can't catch the 10 : 47. Coming later.' Oh, I know these fellows. There's no pulling 'em out of the arms of an unprincipled woman, once she's got hold of them.

"Well, well! I've done my best, however bad it is. Perhaps Ronsome couldn't have done any more. It's easy for him. All he has to do now is to go by contra, and tell me I shouldn't have done what I did, and why haven't I done what I didn't."

If only his eye, probing every now and then the glittering spaciousness beyond the window, could have attached itself companion to the Poet, and gone with him which way he wended, Pendlip might have found still further cause for pessimism.

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“**T**HINK it over?” cries Pendlip to himself out of the grim certainty of his unbelief. “Why! There’s nothing for a right-minded fellow to think over. He might as well tell me he’ll think over the Ten Commandments. I’ve let the truth into him. He knows his duty. What’s there to think over now—but whether he means to do it?”

And yet the Poet has very much to think over, for all that.

In the first place, he has not been frank with Pendlip, for morals have their significant fractions as well as figures, and Pendlip is of the astute order of manhood that calls itself plain and blunt and commonsense, and sees and estimates all human conduct in corresponding plain large numerals, regarding every factor below whole numbers as inconsequent, albeit in his own domain of business there is not the smallest decimal but has its force, and a sixteenth or a thirty-second in the vicissitudes of a share shows to his raking eye as prominent as the magnified shadows at sundown. He can no more appreciate the Poet’s real self than he can appreciate his poetry, which many times he has been led to with the best of prides, esconced in his large leather reading-chair, saying, by way of preface, “Let’s see what we can make of it this time!”—and always with the same result. “Yes, yes. The fellow seems to have some beautiful language. It’s a pity he can’t express himself more plainly. I’m hanged if I know what half of it means.”

All those intermediate shades of feeling that scarcely have a language for their expression; those impalpable transitions of mood; those subtle enharmonic modulations between crude right and wrong that make the beauty and the spaciousness and the perplexity of a poet's soul, are non-existent for Pendlip. They are as impossible of reproduction in his direct nature as Chopin's nocturnes on a glockenspiel. In place of understanding, Pendlip must rely on indulgence; which should be (though it rarely is) the safeguard of ignorance, to be lenient toward those things it does not understand. In the matter of the Poet's verse, this lenience is duly displayed. Pendlip turns the pages with a puzzled but larely benevolent finger, saying: "Well, well. There must be something in it, I suppose. These critics ought to know what they're talking about. But poetry isn't for plain men like us, that have never been brought up to it. Let's look at the newspaper. I'm more used to that." His doubts are to himself alone; he would as soon think of depreciating the Poet's value as the chances of a company in whose fortunes he is concerned. But toward the Poet's conduct—that is infinitely more complex and more difficult to understand, since, unlike his verse, it has not been composed for the public intelligence—he shows far less indulgence. Nor is the Poet ignorant of it. He has not filled the formal rôle of son to Pendlip in the past without learning the brick-wall boundaries of the big man's nature; boundaries that enclose conspicuous virtues, and shut others out. In the Poet's bosom, deep locked away from all external sight, double-barred behind the boy's deference and affection, he has the slight inevitable contempt of all impulsive, fluid, and impassioned youth for the rigidity of hide-bound age. Pendlip's knowledge of the ways of youth perished largely with his own; like

his knowledge of the classics and ancient history. To seek enlightenment from him on the dark pages of youth's mind were as futile as to invoke his aid upon the text of Anacreon or Ovid.

With James Ronsome the case was otherwise. He had grown old in wisdom, not in heart. Experience of life had annotated, not destroyed, the page of youth; of whose impulse and meaning he knew far more than wayward youth itself. Had he stood for Pendlip at this juncture, with all the justificatory right and title that Pendlip held, there would have been opening of confidences, withdrawal of bolts, a disclosure of the Poet's bosom. Ronsome's broad toleration was to Pendlip's propriety what a free and open park is to enclosed grounds. With Ronsome there were no conversational trespass-boards, or moral man-traps or startling spring-guns to apprehend; no booming interjections, no disconcerting looks of incredulity and horror. Ronsome's epithets and Pendlip's epithets, though they might be identical, differed as widely in the respective utterances as meats in the cooking. Pendlip's "Damme" crackled spontaneously like a dry log in a hot fire; Ronsome's, more deliberate, would have possessed the quality of an amused smile. Pendlip's "fool," however leniently uttered, would have revealed something of the heat of censure by which it had been minted. Ronsome's would have lain like a hand on the shoulders; companionship much more than reproof; comforting to sustain and comfortable to acknowledge. "Oh, of course, I've been a fool. But then——"

Before such a one as Ronsome, the Poet might have exposed his thoughts without reservation or fear. Even if the wearer of the distinguished gray felt hat had been reluctant with his counsel—though, in this present phase of the case it is unlikely—at least he would have

lent encouragement to words, and made confidences welcome and at home, like the friendly watcher of a task, whose presence renders passive help, though wisdom be too wise to interfere. To open the mind before Pendlip was as if to submit some manuscript effusion to a writing master; blind to all but the scrupulous formation of letters, and the strict observance of the established laws of penmanship. Of those delicate yet tenacious moral obligations, those nerves and veins and sinews that thread the tissue of all but the corruptest conduct—and are not wholly absent there—Pendlip would have had no knowledge. Healthy tissue must be cut away remorselessly with diseased; the whole visible ill must be removed as though good and bad were separable qualities, distinct as the words themselves, of which no part of one could pass into the substance of the other.

So, filled with thoughts he might not utter, the Poet sought to be alone with them. He knew, not less than Pendlip, how much remained unsaid; how much to touch on; and feared the heavy conversational tread, so fraught with danger to fine feelings; the forced confidence—only alternative to the flat lie; the necessity to declare all that moral contraband his mind carried. As he passed beyond Pendlip's door along the carpeted corridor, he was sensible of a curious change in the composition of external life, that marked his altered relation to it. He had come this evening, despite a certain sub-anxious curiosity, in an ebullient mood; elate and vital; sparkling with the vintage of his own youth; aflush with a sort of conquest; breast to breast with the world, as though he and the world were of one mold and stature, companions and co-equals that shared each other's joys. He passed from Pendlip's presence sustaining the burden of a mind, in place of what the punished Titan bore. The world and he were almost strangers; no

common bond of happiness united them now; each pursued his separate way, regardless of the other—yet not regardless. Conscious, rather, with the half-defiant consciousness of one-time friendship at feud. The voice of the world appeared to the Poet pitched affrontively high, as if to reach and wound him; its ostentatious pleasures seemed to enforce themselves maliciously upon his notice. The report of a champagne cork, amid the burst of convivial laughter, caused his soul to wince as if a gibe had been aimed at it. He carried himself consciously higher, animated by a certain proud rebellion toward this disloyal world; this false friend that showed so fair a face and slandered him. There was a babel of voices in the vestibule; a subdued storm of conversation, rent with the quick lightning of treble laughter and rolling bass thunder, that drowned the plashy music of the mimic waterfall, tumbling from ledge to ledge among the green ferns of the central rockery. He sensed the power of all this conversation as hostile and destructive; merciless machinery for the manufacture of malice and uncharitableness, tearing up the rags of truth to make fustian. Through processes like this his own reputation had passed, was passing now, perhaps; would pass again—for verily man does not live by bread alone.

He stalks through the rhythmic flutter of fans, restless as birds in an aviary; the bare white throats held up here and there to stooping masculine eyes; the slender columns of neck, put forth as the Poet came in sight, with the gentle insistence of swans, waiting for crumbs on the lake in the dell. If, in the past, he has been blind to all the evidences spread around him, he makes up for the lack this night, when not a glance, directed from whatsoever corner, but finds its mark, and strikes him like an arrow, surely aimed. But the perverse and outrageous pride that sustains all evildoers,

comes to his rescue and lends him a demeanor that looks like scorn. These curious glances do not touch confusion in him, but ignite defiance. He rejects them with a sense of lofty scorn for narrow righteousness; wishes the thing they think of him more palpable in his brow and person; throws up his chin; walks through them with high disregard like a young demi-god that scorns to tread convention's beaten road, but is a prince of the trackless hills and dizzy pinnacles and mountain-peaks, unsubject to the narrow laws of men. The mood lasts until the agile page boys fling open wide the doors that impatient consequence may have room to pass. But once beyond, and underneath the open sky, this spurious transitory pride lies down within him. He becomes but a mortal, much engrossed with his own mind, wrapped in the dark folds of it; walking muffled to the brow.

XLI

HE is not shocked; he is not wrathful; he is not penitent; bears no animosity; nurtures no indignation; has neither reproaches for himself nor for that other. The injury to reputation hurts him least. In the suddenness of catastrophe he scarcely even notes this scratch to character, and then only with the contemptuous regard that will not admit pain from such a paltry wound. He is more amazed with his own blindness than stunned with the truth so palpable he has not seen. Like a player in the old hoodman game, set to an object blindfold, and three times twisted before release, he cannot credit with the wrapping off how far his instinct of direction has misguided him. Of defence he can attempt none, either of himself or her. Unbandaged he sees wonderingly, but full well, the truth, and the extent of his own divagation from it. Not for nothing these palpitations in her presence; these hot temptations, cunningly fed with smiles and soft scents and negligent unconscious touches; these careless sighs, breathed in front of him, that caused a space between the subsiding bosom and the corsage, sucking down his eyes as the ebbing tide takes seawrack until the white flesh returns again and brimmed up to fill its confines, and the cup of a Poet's temptation; the laughter, low, insidious, as though it accused his desires and challenged his cowardice; when a whole woman's empire trembled perilously before him as if it were but a single

raindrop suspended from a swaying branch, and crying: "Shake me. Shake me. You dare not."

For no. He had not dared. That secret something, infinitely feebler, infinitely stronger than desire, had saved him, defrauded her; even when, casting aside the silent armory of the senses, she had brought her warfare to the frontier of speech, and let fall sayings that hinted at a void between them; a breach in the completeness of his content that she knew not how to fill. "I have played to you; I have sung to you; I have talked to you. Yet I know if I turn my shoulders for half a moment you will take the opportunity to yawn. How difficult you boys are to entertain! Tell me what more I can do to please you." Even when she said this, lifting her face up to his from the piano, so that she needed only to rise, or he to stoop, to bring their lips together, he avoided encounter with her words, retreating laughingly before the sense of them.

"Nothing more. Less, indeed, if you would not altogether overwhelm me. My gratitude must surely be sincere, since it expresses itself so badly."

Now he knows for what they were, these sighs and words and tokens; then but suspected, and even his own suspicions of them suspected in turn, rather than that she should be misjudged upon the false testimony of his troubled senses. What Pendlip tells him makes these dark uncertainties all plain, but the truth, that Pendlip deems a solvent for every difficulty, serves but as the starting-ground for problems, not the settlement of them. What has been, is nothing; what is to be, everything. Over the irrevocable why spill tears! This beautiful woman is what she is; the past cannot alter; like her beauty, it can only fade. All this history of their Spathorpe days is chronicled in life's blood, that may lose color through the agency of time, but little

else; can only perish utterly with the mortal vellum on which its records are inscribed.

If the drama comprised no characters beyond these two; if the Poet's obligations began and ended with the second of them; if the motive were no more than the strife between desire and duty: the body and the soul, then it were susceptible of a quick ending, whether for weal or woe. But more than the fortunes of these participants is pledged in it. Another destiny hangs trembling on the issue; other happinesses, far-reaching, more remote, depend on what shall follow. This hard truth has shown the Poet a second, and a softer. It brings Bella to his mind, tenderly and sorrowfully, with an elegiac beauty that moves this Poet's breast to strange emotion. What, hereafter, is her life to be? What, deserted now, may prove to be her fate? so perilously beautiful; so deadly placed. She is but a child in years; in spirit less than in those; who worships him with a child's affection, and is beloved by him with a quality—save for the worldly wisdom that clouds it—not less clarid than her own. The very freedom of their delightful friendship horrifies him as a portent for the future. He is Pharisee enough to think himself in some-wise better than the rest of men. Translate but this intimacy into terms of general mankind, and see with what perils it is fraught. The girl stands on the threshold of life; Nature, alone, must shortly whisper in her ear and waken knowledge of suspected wisdom; ripen her with dangerous impulses, as well as blood. Innocence is but a figment; growth both spiritual and corporal involves much breaking down of cells. Purity, at best, is but the name for impurity rightly understood. Bella must grow; Bella must burst this envelope of innocence that clads her now; part with old purity for new wisdom; confront a world likely to show her all the less mercy

by reason of her greater need of it, and exact toll of her for her mother's transgressions. What will happen then to this lonely flower of neglect, growing all unnoticed now like the modest violet? Will not her fragrance betray her? Can such a fair and unprotected flower bloom without peril, in a spot exposed to the bleakest winds of calumny and worse than calumny—cold, bitter truth?

Alas! The Poet thinks not, and the greater part of his thinking is for her. Her image seems so close to him that, at a wish, he could believe her hand in his, her footsteps fitting proudly to his own, yet falling behind by the shortage of an inch or two at each stride taken, and seeking compensation in a skip. He hears her voice under his ear; senses the companionship of her, as dear and welcome as the bud-warmed breeze in May. All his allegiance, all his protection, rise at the thought. She is too dear for sacrifice. Whatever else, out of this shipwreck of emotions, Bella shall survive. If, and so far as, mortal may devise it, her life and happiness shall be secured. He will not desert her. Friends they have been; friends they shall be. And if this little playmate of his heart, this sister-by-deed, ever come to think gratefully of her knight errant—but that is all in the bosom of the future, as dim as old lace or ghostly tapestry. For the present, all that stirs in him is a noble chivalry; a virtue transcending itself, that rides the gallant steed of resolution over these ruins like some reckless courier across a battlefield. So swift does his charger bear him that he finds himself in front of the Sceptre before he deemed the journey more than well begun, and has to pause in a difficult exercise of memory to decide by what way he has reached this elevation—whether across the viaduct or the Parade bridge, or down and up again through the hollow of the dell? He

thinks it was the latter, and a few steps further is assured of it, for did he not avoid the bridge lest he might have to stem the pouring current from the Parade? But the Parade is still animate; its mass still instinct with corporate vitality.

He hears the band below, and the murmur of the sea, and looks down upon the myriads of twinkling lights like the reflection of another firmament. Upon the forms that space out the asphalt pathway above the Parade gardens figures are seated under the starlight; couples, chiefly, compressed almost into the semblance of units, and distinguishable only by the duplex head. They occupy the extremities of the benches, with a prodigal waste of space between; wrapped, each, in a comfortable murmurous sound, or in a silence even deeper; and the Poet—in the brief respite between one abstraction and the next—wonders what awakenings the world reserves for these. He walks in the roadway, between the seated figures and the row of high houses, lit up in almost every window from basement to garret, and exhibiting a signal emptiness as if they formed the proscaenium of a panorama, and one stream of naked light illuminated all. Each room constitutes a world; each world, despite an outward similarity, differs from its neighbors; here are diners or supper-takers, agitating their busy heads around a crowded table; there, are solitary readers who pore under a lamp; elsewhere are some that sit by the open window and intercept the flood of light, or, wrapped in rugs, drink of the freshness of the starlight from the balcony. Of all these, in their resemblance and diversity, the Poet makes one picture with a single glance, and returns to his brooding

The latch is down at Mrs. Herring's; thin laths of light through the oblique venetian blinds in Sir Henry Phillimore's room show the aged knight returned.

Daisy Pendlip's letter, that has missed the northern post of overnight, awaits the Poet on the hall-stand. He walks up the stairs with it, tearing it open automatically as he goes, and reads it beneath the chandelier in his room, going through all the elaborate process of perusal, and scarcely notes or comprehends a word. With much more speculation does he con the dial of his watch, weighing this in an undecided hand as if it were a purpose balanced on the scale. Indecision, too, is shown in the Poet's attitude. He has not removed his overcoat, nor yet his hat, but sits on the table-edge, swinging a leg, the picture of moody youthful dissipation, were this a billiard table and the hour less infantile. And first he says he cannot go to-night; and then he says it was a promise; and his hands and head turn very hot of a sudden, and he pushes back his hat and blows through his lips as if to cool himself. And after that he rises restlessly and paces up and down his room—just as Pendlip is doing at the other end of the bay—with his coat flung open and his hands plunged in his trousers' pockets, communing fervidly with himself.

After what Pendlip has told him? In face of what he knows? Confess the truth? Impossible.

Go and tell her some trumped-up story? Frightfully sorry. Sickness of a friend. Must leave Spathorpe without delay. No, no. As little possible as the other. Their instincts are too well acquainted for such transparent falsehoods. She would read and scorn the lie in him at once.

Break this appointment? Act the cad? Write her a fugitive note? Let her curl her lip over his cowardice?

What then?

What then? Then the boy's blood lays sudden siege

to him, and all his pulses tingle, and all the passions and desires that have their secret habitation in the fleshwork of youth—youth's glory and despair—break loose in him and course from cell to cell, brandishing fire-brands and torches, and bearing down those few poor anchorite thoughts, slaves of prayer, that with pale lips and supplicating hands plead mortification and duty. Conscience staggers before the onrush, and falls. She is there, this wonderful piece of womanhood, within a stone's throw; nearer than that; within the closest circle of his desires; awaiting him; watching the hands of the timepiece, ceasing her music now and again, if she be at play, to listen for the first intimation of his step. Bliss, delectable enough to fill the very measure of the firmament, trembles on a boy's mere self-denial; on his blanched and rigid "No." He swims with the desire to meet temptation once again; with the impulse to succumb to it; to fasten his thirsty lips to this chalice of sweet red sinfulness and drain the cup to the last dregs of remorse.

Oh, Richard Pendlip, perambulating your indignation from wall to wall of your apartment, as this boy does his passion; Richard Pendlip, that will later roll your elderly and comfortable person into the creaking hospitality of an unfamiliar bed, and pitch and toss between the blankets for your final ease of posture like a porpoise that rolls up coast in a dirty sea; Richard Pendlip, whose veins are heated—as by your gray hairs, propriety shall hope—by no passion hotter or more debatable than wrath; be lenient toward this boy, for if you could taste one tittle of the insurrection in your flesh that rends his kingdom, be sure you would not lack for mercy.

Twice the boy throws down his hat, as if his courage—or his conscience—abdicated, saying: "I can't go.

It's giving her the game." And then he summons thoughts of Bella to help him quell the tumult; reciting the girl's virtues like an Ave Mary; holding the image of her before his eyes. Passion and conscience parley; strike a truce and blend. The late contestants are dangerously indistinguishable. This visit, urged at first by undissimulated passion, takes on the character of a crusade. Conscience, employing passion's mercenaries, proclaims a holy war. Bella is to be the motive of it. Bella's emblem decorates his standard. And the Poet reclaims his hat.

Does he practice self-deception, this boy? Is he, after all, in the seclusion of his own heart, a hypocrite self-confessed, if not proclaimed?

That no man, not even the historian, is able truly to decide. When piety and the passions mingle forces, it is like the union of two springs that mix their waters underground. Nor can himself, in whose bosom they meet and flow, trace back each separate current to its source. He feels to glow with righteousness, even though that righteousness draw its warmth from contact with temptation. He goes determined to prevail, yet thrilled with subtle knowledge of the sweetness to succumb. The saint consumes to touch the sinner's cup and sense the thrill of glorious temptation, albeit strengthened with more glorious purpose to renounce it. So, with a sinner's recklessness and a saint's fervor, the Poet goes to keep appointment with the Flesh.

XLII

IT was half past ten when the Poet led his reconciled factions down the stairs. He met Sir Henry, too far ascended for retirement, on his way to bed, with the fringed plaid shawl over his shoulders and a pair of bedroom slippers in his hand. The aged knight came to a standstill, deriving support from the handrail, till the Poet passed him; moved to coughing by the effort of speech, so that the gripped banister creaked in sympathy with his laboring body. At the landing he turned again and looked long and steadfastly at the door through which the Poet's figure had disappeared. He did not clasp his snowy beard, nor shake his head, but the mere address of his person to the next stair seemed eloquent of a despair of youth. Beginning the night when reputable age was on its way to bed! These boys ruled the world; consumed their candles like fire-eaters. What were we coming to?

If the aged moralist had but accompanied the instigator of these reflections, he might have found still further confirmation of his thought, and beheld the Poet moralist in turn. For the side-door in the garden wall of Cromwell Lodge stood ajar, sheltering two figures as the Poet passed abreast of it. One, letting issue a startled "It's him," melted into the garden beyond, with a faint likeness to Mrs. Dysart's waiting-maid, whose eyes studied the Poet so diligently in the glass; the other, of more masculine proportions, started from the doorway as if suddenly expelled by hand, and de-

parted in the shadow of the wall—though with steps of no conclusiveness, that would come to a stop (the Poet knew full well) the moment his own were sufficiently removed, and return to the farewell interrupted. So the side-door not less than the front has its secrets! A smile, too fleeting for the lips to seize, passes across the Poet's mind. No human action but transcends the agent, and has an influence elsewhere, on some other. By these two figures mumbling in the shelter of the door he is conceived, in all belief, a pattern and a fellow; his conduct doubtless lends a comfortable assurance to their own, since it fortifies the weak to err in company with the strong. The disturbed courtier, making pretence to whistle and rubbing the wall with his elbow as he feigned to go, has a good precedent for dalliance. Through this gaping door much knowledge of the life beyond has leaked, and he knows, be sure, more of the passing Poet than the Poet knows or seeks to know of him.

From the far side of the high familiar wall, above whose coping an aura of diffused light reveals the glow of the garden window, comes the sound of intermittent music, but no voice; passages played with a loitering finger that seems to toy with time. The sound goes to the Poet's bosom, dislodging the coward in him, as if this tinkle had been the drums of war. With all his combined forces he shirks engagement with this single enemy. Well, fear is a true sign of conscience after all. It takes him by the studded door without so much as a glance at what he passes, as if it were some plague-house portal, and into the silent square where curious watchers—and it is a lone square in Spathorpe that has none—may see him push back his hat to feel the coolness of the stars upon his forehead and publish his white front a dozen times beneath the flicker of the single

gas-lamp. But he is gone at last, when interest looks for him again, with a girl's name written on his resolution, and mounts the steps of Cromwell Lodge to press the white button of the electric bell. Its thrill, that distantly succeeds, stirs him like a tremor of his own flesh. "Jacta est alea!" he says at the sound of it, and has little time for more before the door opens.

It opens seductively, discreetly, with the soft promptitude that spells welcome better than words. One might know that a woman stood behind it, even if the perfume of her did not mingle with the eddies stirred by the door's withdrawal and his own entrance. And curiously enough—a phenomenon noted by the Poet's self—her presence in a moment calms him; restores him all his threatened composure. Imagination has passed him through such a crucible, it seems that, by contrast with the cool reality of her, passion is chilled to the temperature of reason. The smile on his face betrays no hint of vicissitude, no look of change, as it responds to Mrs. Dysart's greeting.

"Ah!" she cries, casting pearly reproach on him as he goes by. "C'est l'enfant prodigue de retour! Viens, mon cher enfant, et dis moi ce qu'il faut pour que je te pardonne ton absence. Quand on dine on oublie, n'est-ce-pas, mon ami? Et la pauvre femme s'ennuie. Les choses de l'estomac s'esquivent des choses du cœur!—" She ran lightly across vocal stepping-stones to English. "Come!" and led the way with laughter. "It would seem then that Poets are not all soul and song and upper-story. There's a little of the basement about them, too. Oh, you men! All your business ends in dinner, like cigarettes in smoke. You don't know how frightfully lonely I have been without you. I was almost beginning to believe in ghosts. Another moment and I should have repented all my sins. Bad

boy that you are, to dine so late." They were in the drawing-room. "Well? What have you to say for yourself?"

"Truly rural!" he replied, with a short laugh. "That's an awful lot to say after dinner."

"You passed an enjoyable time with your friend?"

"—Thank you."

"Bella was full of him. She says she simply loves him. He is a darling, with the most beautiful whiskers. . . . Good gracious!" Mrs. Dysart broke off to intimate displeasure at the Poet's hat and coat. "Why have you brought those dreadful things in here? You stand like a *memento mori*. I feel my age at the sight of you. Time flies fast enough without being prompted. Take them off."

He objected. "Really—it is too late. I only just came—— I was afraid you might be sitting up for me."

"So I am."

"I did not come to stay——"

"You came to keep me company, and make up for all I have missed of you to-night. Take them off. Be obedient."

He felt the subtle toils of her tones and laughter, and tried to resist the web of bondage spun about him.

"Please—I really ought not to keep you up. I am not thinking about myself."

"I don't want you to. You have had all the night to do that. I want you to think about me . . . You wilful boy!" She came swiftly to him with an imperious smile that brooked no denial. "I must compel you, then. You spare my modesty nothing. Can't you profess friendship, even if you feel none? Dissimulation is the first letter of the alphabet of politeness. So, and so——" With her quick, supple fingers she undid the

buttons of his coat. "Now!" and pulled laughingly upon the sleeve. He suffered himself to be divested, surrendered his hat. Had they been sword and buckler he could not have felt more conscious of disarmament. Now he was at her mercy in respect to time. Cut off from hat and coat his line of retirement lay broken; with no reckonable aid from the ready moments, retreat (if it come to that) must be a rout. And this beginning was unpropitious not only in the sacrifice of his defences, but the enemy's reconnaissance in force dismayed him. He had seen the look of resolute conquest in those violet-gray eyes; the touch of this white hand had been triumphant; from the warmth and fragrance of that defiant body brought so close to him, his sentry senses told him that this night the warfare of the flesh would be declared; the battle fought, and lost or won.

Strange it is how knowledge weakens when rather it should strengthen. Had he known nothing of this woman he could have fought her easier than now. Her weakness only taints his courage. He feels what Pendlip felt, the undermining shame that shames to shame her; by what he knows, the more he shirks. He dreads lest she shall pluck the secret from his eyes, and read what he withholds from her, in characters of cowardice. Pendlip's task is now become the Poet's task, intensified by reason of the finer tissues to be wounded. Pendlip's emotions are the Poet's emotions magnified; Pendlip's misgivings, his. Now he realizes what prudence might have known before: the fearful inequality of a contest where the one dreads above all to wound, and yet must wound to conquer; and the other by being conquered and being wounded, so much the nearer wins; snatching victory out of very defeat.

"I was a fool to come," the accusation flashed through him. "To-morrow—by daylight—I might have

faced her. But to-night. Why didn't I take the proper coward's course, as Pendlip wished me, and send her a letter after I was gone!" And when he looked upon her now, in this soft-lit room, the knowledge of his weakness grew. The light, behind these silken shades, hid itself discreetly like a face behind a fan. Illumination was no higher than a whisper between confidants, and possessed of the same mysterious power to magnify the subject touched on, and endow it with mysterious wonder. The lamps spread soft spheres of radiance, sunlit islands in a twilight sea, that widened their shores to welcome the woman when she neared them, seeming to wrap their radiance about her gleaming shoulders, and lend all their glow to her beauty. Her very toilet, now he was confronted with it, made the Poet's courage falter. It was as if the flesh, tired of being so long and wilfully ignored, had said: "This night you shall not overlook me. See. I declare myself." Only a single necklet of seed pearls interposed between the whiteness of her throat and bosom; the corsage, daringly reduced, professed the least dependence on her shoulders; her milk-white bust swelled out of it undecked or unadorned like that first Venus issuing of sea-foam.

"There!" She laid the Poet's offending hat and coat on a chair in the far corner of the window, and swam back to him as if floated by her own laughter. "Now we can talk better. Stop. I have disarranged your tie in taking off your coat. You look as if you had been to the club. No, no. You shall stand still. You have been drinking Benedictine. And you smell of cigar." Her fingers adjusted the tie for him. Their profiles almost touched; her violet-gray eyes provoked him at such close quarters that their two visions blurred into one, like waterdrops that blend. But the audacity

she would have roused in him failed her. His face in the ordeal hardened, and there was little smile left on it when she let him go. "There. I spoil you. I suppose all the women spoil you. You may thank me if you like." She subsided into the cushions of the low chair in which he had first seen her, and laughingly toyed with her rings.

He said: "Thank you," but his lips were dry. Impulse, in the brief assault, had been restrained as hardly as a recruit smarting under temptation to answer fire. Pride as much as passion moved him. He burned to display his courage before this audacious foe, and prove himself the man she challenged, and no mere boy, blind to her temptations or fearful of his own.

"Do we need any longer to be invited to the chairs?"

"I think not."

"Sit down, then, and don't look at me as if I were a schoolmarm. You embarrass me, standing up there like the kept-in scholar, that doesn't know his multiplication table and counts my freckles out of spite."

He chose the settee, as farthest from her. She saw the ruse and laughed exposure of it.

"And I did not send you into the corner. Why are you frightened of me? Are you a bad boy?"

"I am a very good boy."

"After all, I don't know whether I like good boys any better than bad ones. But why have you such a long face?"

"I did not know I had a long face."

"To be sure you have. A fiddler could play the most dreadful tunes on it. What has your friend been saying to you?"

He stammered: "My friend?"

"You said he was your friend. Perhaps he isn't your friend any longer. Have you quarreled?"

"Not at all——" He drew his breath.

"——But what?"

"But nothing."

"Oh, yes. But something. I am sure of it. You had 'but something,' on the tip of your tongue."

The Poet made no answer. His heart, responding to this declaration of war, drummed behind his white front. The battle was begun.

"Well?"

"Well."

"So I am right. Of course, you need not tell me the truth, you foolish boy! I don't expect it; there's no need to look so scared. I'm only a woman, and a woman never learns the truth except from her looking-glass—or when truth's very dreadful."

"Truth is not so dreadful as that. At least, for you. It is a question of business," he blurted out. "I shall have to leave Spathorpe." And tried to express carelessness through a use of slang. "It's frightfully rotten, but I can't help myself." He dropped his eyes from the woman as he said it, but felt the momentary breach in the current of her smile, for all she did not cease to twist her rings.

"So that is what has spoiled your dinner?"

She was speaking through her veil of quiet laughter again. He knew it by the sound of her voice, and the fact lent him courage to face her.

"We did not discuss it until the end."

"And that is what brought your friend to see you?"

"Yes."

"All the way from town?"

"I suppose so."

"And must you really go?"

"Really and truly."

"When?"

"To-morrow."

"So soon?"

"I can't get out of it."

He began to breathe again. The crisis, so dreaded all this while, seemed to dissolve in the surmounting like a hill under the pedestrian's foot, that showed perpendicular when first he faced it. He drew assurance from the sense of liberty at hand.

"It's a frightful nuisance. All my packing. Just when I was so comfortable and happy."

"You poor boy! And how long will this dreadful business take you?"

"How long?" He had thought the hill surmounted! His breathing thickened again.

"Yes. How long shall you be away? When do you return?"

"I don't know." His words were hurried. "That wasn't discussed. Pendlip didn't say." He temporized like any scullion with a fault to hide. She looked at him for a moment enigmatically, and then at her rings, and then out again to him as though he puzzled her. Then she laughed endearingly into his troubled face and drew his eyes into her own through their inviting veil of thick lashes, kissing them with all but lips in the violet-gray depths beyond before she gave them sudden open-eyed release.

"But you are going to say!" she told him gaily. "You are going to promise me a day of return. Of course you are. You owe it to me. I have taken all your business for gospel—and haven't laughed once—though business is the last word a woman should ever believe. And now you are going to reward my confidence. Come! I haven't asked you what your business is. We'll pretend it's terribly important. How many days do you want for it? Tell me, so that I

may know when to expect you, and may tick the days off with my finger. Two? Three? Don't ask me to say more than that."

He shook his head with a dry-lipped smile. His heart pumped the blood to his brain with labored throbs, like the engines of a crazy coal-tug thrusting her against the tide. How easily he might have lied for release; purchased liberty with cheap falsehood! But his trouble was above guile. Deception at this crisis never even occurred to him.

"I can't promise. I don't know when—I can't be certain of anything at present."

The woman let fall her fingers, and the smile dropped off her lips suddenly like a bird from the bough. Nothing but sober inquiry gazed at him now from her fixed deep eyes.

"You mean—that you are not coming back at all."

They were at the truth of it at last.

"I'm afraid I do mean that."

There was a pause. Then the woman blazed out with a luminous and lovely smile, laying her hand upon the cushion of a chair close by. "Come here, you curious boy, and sit by me where I can see your face. You are all in the shadow over there and I can't make you out a bit. I want to talk to you."

He did not move.

"Come!" she called to him again, tapping the chair persuasively with her hand. "Surely I am not grown so very terrible that you need to be asked twice."

"It would be easier if you were."

"That is the first nice thing you have said to me since you came. I want you to say ever so many more nice things like that!" She still indicated the chair with a soft hand laid upon its cushion, proffering the invitation in her smile; and still, with a strained smile

in return, he tried lightly to decline it, as though her request and his refusal were playful insincerities; a laughing fence between them, and not a grim passage of arms flashing in the sunlight. "Fie! you naughty boy! Where are your manners to keep a lady waiting for you!"

He begged: "No, no! Don't ask me, please. It only makes things harder for me."

"For you! Oh, the selfishness of man. There are no hardships for woman, then. The only sufferings in the world are those you feel; you cannot divine any. Well? You won't come to me? Then I must come to you, I suppose." She withdrew her hand from the chair and rose in all her supple length of womanhood, sweeping, with the confidence of beautiful laughter, to the settee.

He saw her coming like a wave, superb in its crested beauty, admired even through the impotence that knows it must engulf him.

XLIII

“THERE!” she said, seating herself by his side. “Now we can tell our troubles away from the lamplight. What is this dreadful bone you are growling over in your corner? Come! You must be a good obedient doggie. I’m not going to take it away from you. I only want to see what it is you’re keeping so terribly to yourself. Let me stroke you.” She put out an arm and drew one of his hands into hers, with a coaxing silken caress. “Why! You are quite cold.” She tightened her clasp upon the chill fingers, and then sandwiched them commiseratively between her soft warm palms, gazing inquiry and compassion into his eyes. “Your hand is quite cold! What sort of business is it that makes one’s hand so cold as this?”

He thought dimly of Pendlip’s retort to his own question, asked and answered a whole century ago: “Everybody’s business,” but, though the kindling warmth of the woman’s clasp set his pulses in commotion and suffocated conscience, he made no effort to release himself, lest retreat might draw a hotter pursuit upon the remnants of his forces.

“What sort of business is it, then?” Mrs. Dysart repeated, squeezing his hand persuasively, as if the answer lay in his imprisoned fingers. “If I have given myself the right to call you by your Christian name, and sometimes do so, and have given you the right to call me by mine—though you don’t ever—surely I may add the privilege of questioning you a little in regard

to business that hurts us both! Mayn't I, now? Mayn't I?" She raised his hand within her own two, holding it suspended beneath the breathing round fullness of her bosom, and the persuasive smooth throat thrown out to him under most appealing lips, ripe for kisses and confession. Even as the Poet looked at her he felt the surging desire to have done with all this stemming of his own blood; to sacrifice all his purpose upon the altar of her lips.

"If we knew each other better—" the velvet lashes emphasized her meaning by adroitly veiling it—"if we knew each other better I should suspect you were grown tired of me, and that—well! you won't be angry?—that you were a little clumsy at taking leave. There! But surely we don't know each other well enough for that. One only parts in that way from friendships that have no more to offer. Surely, not from a pretty woman one is just beginning to know and care for, and who cares a great deal for one in return. Am I to suspect conscience?"

He clutched at the suggestion, saying: "Yes."

"What sort of conscience? Another woman? Prettier, perhaps, than this?"

"No, no."

"Oh, I could have forgiven you freely, even if it had been. Man's conscience is often nothing but a pretty woman in disguise. Are you acting under a sense of duty? You are not—engaged?"

He lent a negative to that, in turn.

She said: "Not that?" and her gaze, swelling comprehensively, seemed to breathe enlightenment at last. "Then it is I," she said very quietly, "who am the cause of your going!"

"No, no!" he protested. His chivalry could not bear to wound this beautiful woman with the weapon

she had put into his hand. "That is not fair. You are not the cause—any more than I."

"You have heard something to-night. Your friend at the Majestic has been talking about me. Well—what has he told you?"

"I am not going to repeat it."

"I need not ask. People do not come two hundred miles to say kind things. The farther news has to travel, the worse it is, as a rule." Her lips curled with the smitten look that scorns to admit the wound. "So I suppose you hate me now."

"Heaven forbid!"

"Yet you want to run away from me." She laid one hand upon his knee; the warmth of each finger crept through upon him like the burn of hot kisses. "Do you believe it?"

"Believe what?"

"What your friend says of me?"

He hesitated. "I will believe you."

"But suppose I don't deny it. Suppose——"

She relinquished her remaining clasp of his hand, and laid her fingers suddenly upon his shoulder with the seductiveness of Eve, bringing her lips near to his own. The words that issued from them came cradled in living perfume that stifled resolution like the scent of the lotus. The warmth from her bosom rose to him, wafted by its own rise and fall. All his physical being seemed to simmer on the fierce stove of temptation, passing away from him through diffused channels of tingling nerve into mere vaporized existence. He was scarcely flesh and blood, but the elemental essence of life; incorporate desire, to be blown this way or that by a woman's breath.

"Suppose I say it is quite true?" She watched his eyes as never woman since the Poet's own mother

had watched his eyes before. "Suppose I say that? Well. What should you answer?"

He answered nothing. His heart was melting.

"Should you hate me then? Should you?" Her fingers were locked behind his neck; her eyes were deadly pools of pleading; large, deep, irresistible.

"I could never hate you."

"Even if it were true?"

"Even if it were true."

"It would make no difference to your thought of me?"

Loyalty answered: "None."

"Dare I believe you?"

"Oh, you may believe me."

She drew her face back and looked at him from the outstretched limit of her arms. "And you would still wish to go?—because it is true?"

He tried, even at this late hour, to justify his resolution. "It is not for my sake alone——"

"But if I tell you I have no sake? The world has robbed me of all the sake I ever had. If I put all the sake on to your own side, and say: 'Stay, if you think my love worth staying for!' If I draw your face forward like this, in my arms—and kiss you—kiss you—kiss you, so, and tell you how we will love each other and laugh at the world! If I say it is true—and I *do* say it—will you kiss me in return, and tell me you love me too, and will not, cannot leave me? Will you? Will you? Will you?"

His lips, wet with the kisses heaped on them, sought blindly after hers like a child at the breast. His arms, put out in the first instance for preservation, were interlocked with hers. The sickly mistiness of a great passion saturated his entire being within its anæsthetic sweetness, as they swayed together over the abyss.

Oh, Mr. Pendlip, sir! uttering at this very moment those extraordinary noises in your bed, as if you were indignant with the mattress, trouble your mind no longer with this boy, for he is beyond the service of your wrath. Your snorts and groans are coinage wasted on a lost cause. You have done your best, sir; you have offered him a feast that should have touched a prodigal, and drunk the finest champagne for his conscience's sake. Dismiss him now and take your well-earned slumber. Nothing but a miracle can save him, and the age of miracles (as everybody knows, sir) is past and gone.

XLIV

YET a miracle saved him.

A few seconds sooner it had been no miracle at all; merely the every-day intervention of Providence. But now it fitted its place in eternity like the hairspring of a watch. There fell a sound of footsteps; the sudden warning of a grasped door-handle. The Poet was expelled from that perfumed embrace like a dewdrop shaken out of the heart of a rose. He heard Mrs. Dysart exclaim: "Bella!"

The name, so long ignored by conscience, fell upon him with the magic of an enchantress' wand. All the thick cloud of passion, vaporized and escaped from his physical keeping, like the Genie of the flask, came back into its frail receptacle of clay. He turned at Mrs. Dysart's exclamation, and the sight of the girl in the doorway was as the throwing open of shutters to the pale cool dawn after a night's fever, with clear daylight streaming through the casement and quenching the candles. And his soul had grace to thank God for deliverance.

The girl's hand lay on the outer knob awhile, as she stood, gazing into the room with contracted eyes of search; a softly luminous presence in the mellow light, clad in a quilted dressing-gown; her bare feet thrust into bedroom slippers of white wool. For all the world, or for all Heaven, she looked at the moment of her entrance like some blest messenger from above. The sudden sound of her own name, falling so immediately on her entrance, had surprised and checked her like

an unexpected drop of rain; but next moment, to the single cry: "Mamma!"—like the glad responsive bleat of a lost lamb that hears the maternal voice at last, she ran forward and flung her arms impetuously around the beloved neck; quenching her lips at that fount of clear affection whose waters flowed so turbidly but the moment since. "Mamma!" she cried, rejoicing strangely in the name. "You are here!" There was a history of mental inquietude in the relief breathed out upon these words.

The love that had coiled so hotly around a poet's heart wound the girl now into the tenderest toils. The passionate wine of wooing with which she had intoxicated conscience, was turned in a moment to milk for the feeding of a girl's affection. She drew Bella under the ineffable protection of her bosom, putting around her a girdle of generous arm that gathered the loose white gown in outline over the girl's soft figure; pressing back with fond fingers the fair width of brow for long gaze into the gray eyes beneath. Aspasia was all mother in a moment. The Poet by her side sat mute and marveled. His own voice, when this miracle took place, could not have served him for a word. It filled him with wonder to think this woman needed so little turning-space for her emotions; her passion doubled like a hare, with such celerity the eye could scarce believe the movement, and would have suspected its own testimony sooner than credit her agility.

"Oh, yes, I am here!" he heard the familiar voice return, with all its old serenity and assurance. "Where else, indeed, should I be? But you are here, too, Bella—and I can't understand that, for by now you should be far away and fast asleep. Whatever has brought you downstairs again, child?"

"I could not sleep—I heard a dog crying. Oh, ever



"He heard Mrs. Dysart exclaim: 'Bella!'"

such a long while. Mrs. Herring says some one's going to die when they do like that, and I wondered who it could be. A dog did that when her uncle died, so it's quite true. She says dogs can smell death ever so far away, and after awhile I was sure I could smell it too, and got out of bed and put on these. Leonie was making a dreadful noise with her nose and it frightened me worse. I wanted to wake her, but I daredn't, because she would have been angry. And then I made up my mind to slip out to your bedroom—for I thought—I didn't know who the dog could mean. Mrs. Herring says it's some of your own flesh and blood, that's bred in the bone. And you, of course—you are all I've got. Except Roo. And I love him too. O my! But he's not bred in the bone, so I knew the dog didn't mean him. First of all I prayed the dog might have made a mistake and meant somebody else—ever so far away. And as soon as ever I came out on to the landing I knew it had, for I saw the light in the hall, and your bedroom door was open— And I came downstairs, and here I am. O my!”

“You dear little goose!” Mrs. Dysart told her. “Allowing yourself to be stuffed with Mrs. Herring's sage and onions and stories of barking dogs! If somebody had to die every time a dog cried, Bella, there would soon be an end to German bands.” She released the girl from the closeness of her embrace and laughed over her with indulgent merriment, in a loosened circle of arm. “There, there!” She stooped suddenly forward and stopped her laughter with two resolutely placed kisses. “Kiss me again, Bella, and go back to bed like the good girl you are—now that you see for yourself what nonsense the dog has been telling you. And don't let's talk about dying when mamma has Roo to take care of her.”

He winced guiltily under the words, as to the playful menace of a blow.

"You call him Roo, too," Bella noticed, with the quick perception of her thirteen years, and then, without giving space for a reply, tilted up her dear head in petition, speaking with the thin and clear and hurried voice for favors. "Let me stay a little while, mamma! Only a little while. Do! Let me sit between you both, and Roo can tell me things to make me forget all about the dog, and I will go as soon as ever you say I mustn't ask to sit up any longer."

"But, dear child! You mustn't really ask to sit up any longer, *now!* Do you know what time it is?"

"No. Don't tell me, and then it won't seem so late. I couldn't sleep all at once, even if I went to bed." She caught keen sight of the concession deep down in the current of Mrs. Dysart's eyes, rippling up to her on an amused bubble. "I know!" she cried, showering her laughter on them both. "It's 'yes' and 'what a funny girl I am, Bella!' O my! make way for me please, and cuddle me up close. It's lovely. I'm glad the dog woke me up—aren't you?" And a moment later she was sandwiched between them on the sofa, with the Poet's overcoat extemporized over her knees as though she were driving a bus, her arms linking all three into a companionship of smiles. First the Poet must tell her all about Mr. Pendlip and the dinner; then they must re-partake of that wonderful tea, scarcely less real in the repetition than in the actuality, and Bella must tell the Poet once more how much she loves this friend of theirs, and now—to-morrow—he shall not leave them, but shall stay, O my! stay ever so long, and see mamma, and have tea with mamma and all of them in the garden. And then, when they have talked like this awhile, and Mrs. Dysart's voice sounds

a warning "Bella!" Bella protests: "No, no, no. Not yet, mamma. Don't say 'Bella' yet. Let Roo tell me a fairy-tale first—a lovely long one, and then I will go as good as good. Begin 'Once upon a time.' O my! I love 'once upon a time' best, don't you?"

So the Poet—almost as fanciful a being to himself as any of these extravagant creatures feigned for Bella—told the girl a fairy-tale beginning even as she wished: "Once upon a time." By all dramatic precedent the tale should have contained an allegory; under guise of a story for the girl he should have preached a parable to the woman. But the idea did not come upon him till too late, and merely then in a vision of satire on the situation, without the least thought to make use of it. At the end of half an hour Bella rose out of her sheath like a nodding night breeze from some drowsy hollow, winding her arms flaggingly round Mrs. Dysart's neck. Sleep lay on her lashes, extinguishing the winking tapers in her gray eyes, and drawing down their curtains to sweet slumber. "Good-night," she said, squeezing out round-mouthed kisses, and echoing good-nights, held up her mouth to the Poet with the kiss already formed on it. For the first time since their friendship the Poet received the token with feeling of shame, as if he took a gift from one already robbed. He did not look at Mrs. Dysart.

"To-morrow," said Bella dreamily, her lips released, "we will go and see Mr. Pendlip again."

"To-morrow never comes, Bella!" the Poet reminded her with a smile.

"To-day then!" Bella substituted. "O my! It must be to-day by this time, mustn't it!"

"Yes. We are all of us a day older, Bella, since you came downstairs. A day older, and I hope a day wiser." That last was for Mrs. Dysart, and Mrs.

Dysart did not mistake the motive. She watched Bella's going with her elbow on her knee and her throat supported in the hollow of her outspread hand. The smile of motherhood was on her lips; no more.

"O my! I don't know about a day wiser!" Bella confided. "I don't think I feel any wiser. I don't think I want to feel any wiser. I'd rather be very, very happy." By the door she turned with one of her sudden impulses to ask the Poet: "Have you noticed my dressing-gown? Do you like it?"

"Very much, Bella."

"I'm glad you've seen it. I have another at home. Almost nicer than this, but I don't know. I'm ever so sleepy, now. Good-night, mamma. Good-night, Roo."

He came out into the hall, ostensibly to see the last of her, but not less with a purpose to protract the moment when he must meet those deep eyes once more. Her white-shod feet went "plop, plop," one after the other up the stairs like baby rabbits; her head nodded. At the bend in the staircase she stooped and called his name with the aroused voice of interest.

"Roo!"

"Yes."

"My hair's not *really* red, is it?"

"Not a bit. Why?"

"Nothing. Only Leonie says it is. That's all."

"Does Leonie sleep with her mouth open?"

"Sometimes."

"Drop the soap into it, Bella."

"O my!"

Two more good-nights and that was all. He remained for some time longer outside the door in the attitude of a listener—but that was not because of the girl. Only because of the woman, sitting motionless and expectant in the room beyond.

XLV

AND then he turned into the room again. Where he had sat of late by Mrs. Dysart's side and passed through that soul's ordeal by combat, merely his coat lay now, limp and inanimate, like a passion slain upon the field. His temptress, with both hands interlocked about her knee, lay back amid the cushions to the limit of her straightened arms. Her chin made a pit for itself in the softness of her breast; her lips were parted in a sustained smile; her eyes, gazing upward through their screen of lashes, intently watchful. They followed the Poet in curious interrogation, part whimsical, part grave, part wistful as he crossed to the fireplace and took up his station with an arm measured out against the length of the mantel. The action was clear. There was no mistaking that definition of distance between them. For awhile each held back on the anticipation of the other's words; words seemed 'imminent' alike behind the woman's smile and the Poet's grave repression. Some other of her sex, perhaps of less discernment than Mrs. Dysart, not knowing, or affecting to ignore, of what ingredients the silence was compounded, might have cracked it inconsequently like an egg, laughing this late interruption aside, and all that pertained to it. But Mrs. Dysart had a finer wit, a deeper understanding than that. Her beauty was not of the flesh alone; spirit mingled with it too. Passion, once damped and trodden underfoot, requires a two-fold labor to rekindle. The spirit of the girl still lin-

gered vital in the room, and made a seemly barrier between them. And it was the thought and memory of her that prompted the Poet's first words.

"There goes somebody," he said at length, "whom we both love better than ourselves."

The little flame of laughter illuminating Mrs. Dy-sart's lips flickered in the sense of his words.

"You mean—?" she asked, for all she knew well what he meant.

"There is only one meaning."

"That makes it the easier to overlook."

"It is—for our sakes and Bella's sake—good-by."

"Again? What! You are revoking to-night like a woman. I thought you were void of that suit half an hour ago. When am I to take you at your word?"

"Now."

"Why now?"

"Because you never took me before."

"That proves my wisdom."

"Here is a chance to prove your generosity."

"I have proved that already."

"In what way?"

"In what way?" She laughed with the slightest taste of bitterness on her lips. "You have a man's memory for favors! It is poor thanks when the giver must record the gift. If I had plucked you a rose, at least you would have worn it in your buttonhole till you had left me. Yet I have plucked and offered you more than that. Much more. The very most that a woman has to offer. Was it so little, then? Have you so soon forgotten?"

"Heaven knows I have not."

"Oh! If my kisses were not sweet enough—they will soon ripen with the warmth of a little loving. Love's fruit ripens like all others in the hot places.

Come, you have tasted me, Rupert. Don't throw me aside so soon. Throw me aside later, if you like, when you have grown tired of me. Leave me when you have learned, through loving, to hate me a little—as all men do in the end. Let us part, if we are to part, on some pretext of a quarrel that leaves me a little anger for my self-respect."

She pitched her voice persuasively with unimpassioned eloquence so as just to reach him and no more; still nursing her knee in the cradle of her interlinked hands. There were moments when she looked to sit to an invisible harp, drawing soft and bitter sweetness from its strings.

"I could never hate you," he declared.

She shook a smiling head. "What did courageous Peter say?"

"Oh! If you think I could not love you," he told her through his tightened lips, "if you think it is easy for me—to talk conscience and duty!—But you do not. You know how long I have been wavering between those and you; what a struggle it has been, and might be still. I am not spurning your generosity. I only ask less of it than you would give."

"Yes, yes," she struck in. "I know you are. But when woman has offered herself, to ask for less is to refuse all. Once she has poured herself out like wine into the glass, it is drink or spill."

"That is not true in this case, or of me."

"It is true. I am a woman. I speak for my sex."

"You are more than a woman." He grew courageous. "You are a mother, too."

"You are unkind to remind me of it."

"I say it to remind us both. Let us at least be true to her. I hold Bella's friendship as sacred as anything in the world. Don't ask me to desecrate that.

- Let us keep it pure and free of self-reproach. As for ourselves—let us be what we have been, and still are, for Bella's sake. Friends."

"Friends!" Mrs. Dysart breathed bitterness upon the word. "You ask too little of me," she said, "and in exchange you wish to give too much. With me, you know it, friendships are impossible. For your love I can give you love, as much as you need; as much as ever you ask. But when you talk of friendship—you know it is a thing I cannot return."

"You misjudge me. I do not know it. I will not admit it. I offer you my friendship as freely as I ask for yours."

"Mine!" She laughed dimly. "What is mine? A thing you could never acknowledge. A gift you would try to hide. Oh, I know! You will deny it and talk as much chivalry as Don Quixote here in this room, alone with me. But once outside in the world, you will admit the truth of it quickly enough. Where is the wisdom in buying worthless friendship at the price for which you could have real love? A woman will not sell herself too cheap, but by the man she cares for she will not let herself be bought too dear. What! Your friend has come over two hundred miles to try and tear you from me, and you still think friendship possible! How much credit has the world given our friendship? How much would it give? So little that you seek to leave me. You speak of friendship when all the while you mean flight. Oh, I know these covert farewell friendships—mere hands put out to take leave; warm and fervid and substantial while one clasps them, and then—gone! How many lovers have we women lost through friendship, a door through which we may not follow, and through which they never return."

If there were bitterness in her words it was not

aimed at him. She spoke with the spirit of a smile still pervading her lips; her submissive candor smote him. He beheld Truth like a dragon that led on Beauty, and his courage would have been St. George, to engage with this monster and slay him, but reason perceived the folly of the combat and restrained the futile ardors of youth. For awhile his lips lacked any words to say, and they faced each other silently; he with his arm against the mantel; she with one white hand inert upon the upholstered back of the settee, and the other softly outspread upon her bosom, its fingers plucking at her pearls. And then, of a sudden, the Poet found his tongue.

"Let us talk of Bella."

She made a lifting movement of her lashes, almost supplicating.

"Why of Bella?"

"Because we are both of us better than ourselves when we talk of her."

"Is it fair to use my child against me?" Her lips preserved their smile of defensive insincerity, but he heard the tones of anxiousness behind them; the apprehensions of a heart that can face truth on all sides but this.

"Against you, no. But for you, I think yes. Besides—it was to speak about Bella that I came to-night."

She twisted her lips with the brief wry face for sour fruit, and said: "You are complimentary." But there was curious interest enveloped in the laugh that followed. "I flattered myself you had come to see me."

"I will tell you the truth now. I was frightened of you."

"Why?"

"Because I had reason. I feared for all my good resolutions."

"What good resolutions were those?"

"Ah! You may well ask that. I asked it, too, before Bella came downstairs. But for her there would be none left."

"You mean your going away?"

"That is only one of them."

"Only one! There were others?"

"I was filled with good resolutions when I came."

"Your good resolutions cannot have concerned *me*. Nobody's good resolutions were ever to my advantage."

"They concerned us all. But chiefly Bella."

"Bella! You think very much of Bella."

"I think deeply much of Bella."

"More than you think of me!"

"More almost than of anybody."

"Certainly more than I had understood. I thought perhaps—but it must have been my vanity—that you made much of her because——"

"Because?"

"Because—it seems a ridiculous confession now—because of me."

"You are partly right. It was because of you both. I scarcely understood my own mind. Bella is but a child, and you seemed like a grown-up Bella. Sometimes at night, when you were seated at the piano, singing to me, I saw Bella's face exact; the very look about the lips and eyes. It felt for all the world as if ten years had passed by since dinner, and Bella was grown into a woman—as some day this must come to pass. She cannot always be the child."

"You did not come to talk to me of this?"

"Of nothing else."

"Why?—And yet you are going to leave Spathorpe!"

I cannot understand. What has all this to do with you?"

"Just as much or as little as you will allow. Will you—will you be offended with me if I take the liberty to speak very openly. I think we are friends enough for that. At first I was too much of a coward. But I feel brave enough for anything now. I want to be frightfully rude. May I?"

"If you like. I am not frightened of any rudeness that comes from you."

"Then tell me. I want to ask. It is a question that has often been in my mind—but never so keenly as to-night. What is going to happen to Bella?" He saw the wince in Mrs. Dysart's eyes, and the constriction of her lips.

"How do you mean! Happen to her! When?"

"Now. At any time. As she grows older."

"God knows—— Do you think I haven't thought about that?"

"And what conclusion have you come to?"

"None." The hopeless brevity of the answer betrayed the degree of effort required to speak it. The mouth, of late so laughing and seductive, was strained and careworn, showing her countenance older. Conscience, filled with self-rebuke and fears, seemed to wring hands behind the window of her beauty.

"But you know the danger threatening her? She cannot be kept a child forever. A year or two—no more than that, and her mind will be alive. She will seek to inquire—to understand many things. And then——"

Mrs. Dysart framed lips of remonstrance and appeal.

"Don't."

"But I must. To-night it is necessary we talk of all these things."

"I know what you want to say. That I am a wicked worthless woman, unfit to have the care of my own daughter. That I am a danger to her purity and happiness. Oh! Do you think I don't know all that without being told. Do you think I haven't a conscience?"

"That is not in the least what I meant to say."

"A conscience all the more terrible for being suppressed and scorned. The doctor told me I must take care of my heart. But for Bella I could wish it were broken, at times. I don't fear death for all I am a woman. Death is as kind as the world, and a friend, at least, that one can never lose. But if I were to die—what would become of Bella? And yet, if I live—what must become of her? Alive or dead it seems as if I can only bring injury to the one I love before all and everybody in the world. For God knows I do love her; have loved her from the first hour she brought me suffering, and taught me the blessedness of pain. I would give all the blood in my veins to save one hair of her head from hurt. She is the only thing in life I value; the only thing I live for, and not even the remorse she makes me feel can take away that joy from my cup. She alone makes the cup bitter; it is she alone that sweetens it. Without her I could live or die with equal indifference. With her I can do neither. I ought to have died years ago, when Bella was born. I see it now. We see all these things when it is too late.

"And yet—I am not so very much more wicked than the rest of women. After all, there is not such a tremendous difference between the sinner and the saint. It's merely the point of view. The one makes a pleasure of pain; the other, a pain of pleasure. Each secretly envies the other's life, and finds discontent with

his own. Do you think, if I could, I would not gladly change the liberty of the world for the pious cruse and crust, and the quiet cell; for a little respite from the tyranny of laughter? Oh! don't imagine I wish to make the Saint Nitouche. I am not trying to justify myself. I am willing to pray with the publican: 'Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner,' for we are all sinners that wilfully fall short of the best in us. I have had my good resolutions, like you; a whole service of them, though most of the pieces are broken now. Only a cracked and broken few remain.

"But I don't want to sicken you with confession and repentance that seek to put all the blame on to somebody else's shoulders. Perhaps I should not lack for shoulders, but it does not matter very much who devised the feast, now one is left to pay the reckoning. Years ago, when I was but a girl—" she broke off. "No! I will not tell you. I will be stronger than that. Women only confess themselves when it is useless any longer to profess. Confession is the side-door to esteem. If we cannot enter a heart through respect, we try to reach it contemptibly by pity. Oh, yes. It is true. I have only to spill a few tears; to wet my lashes with them; to make my bosom rise and fall; to put my hands before my face, and you would begin to falter under your good resolutions. When all seems lost, a woman has still her tears. When all seems won, a man has still his vanity, that loves to be wept for."

And so much, indeed, had the emotion of her own words stirred her, that, when she stopped on a sudden, her lashes had actually begun to gleam. She tried to smile at him through beautiful magnified eyes, and for a moment, while the tears grew and dissolved, there was a silence between them. Had Mrs. Dysart, even then, turned those wet and quivering lashes to account,

and tried on her opponent the feint so frankly exposed, who knows? She might have had him at her side again. She held his destiny within her dewy lashes as a sorceress holds the world in her crystal, and the Poet's heart trembled. But the woman laughed instead, shaking away like rain the tears that gathered in her eyes, with a beautiful admission of folly.

"There, there!" she said. "See how easily a woman weeps! As easily as a man forgets. I could have cried more effectively than that, believe me—had I wished, but I gave you my word. Well, what were we talking about? Oh, I remember. It was my wickedness. You said I was unfit to have the charge of a daughter. I think you are quite right. I have thought the same for years."

XLVI

“**I** SAY such a thing? You wrong me. Never in this world.”

He had listened to her words with the silence that pays respect, not acquiescence. All the while she was speaking his conscience cried: “No, no!” but her words came out of the fullness of a heart, like worshipers from the house of God, and speech, though of another persuasion, stood aside and did not tax them. “If I had said anything I should have said this: The world contains no better mother.”

The assertion drew her eyes upon him, widened and inquiring.

“How do you mean? Why do you say that?”

“Because I believe it.”

“There is something you hide from me.”

“Nothing.”

“Something I am not clever enough to understand.”

“Not at all. You understand Bella. Bella is the proof of my assertion. If you need any better tribute to your care than Bella, tell me where it is to be found.”

“Ah—Bella!” she cried, as if the mere word Bella explained all. “But it is no tribute to my care; the tribute is to herself. She cannot help being what she is. It is not because I have not neglected her.”

“Whatever you may say of yourself you have given her nature what it needed. Love, indulgence, generosity, the influence of your own beauty. All that Bella has, she owes to herself and you. In hands more

scrupulous for her welfare she might have been terribly otherwise. Let us believe in Providence, shall we? for once; and say that in this worst of all possible worlds you were chosen designedly for Bella's good. That is what I believe. Believe it with me, too. Let us, from to-night, look upon ourselves as the ministers of Providence. Providence gave Bella to you, Providence brought Bella to me. Providence made no mistake in her choice of mother. Providence—well, I hope it—made no mistake in her choice of friends. There was horrible scope for error in both. And now, what Providence has begun—let us complete. Providence has confidence in you. I have confidence in you. Providence has confidence in me. Have confidence in me, too. I ask leave to be your friend, and Bella's friend. Will you let me?"

"Oh, my friend Rupert!" she said. She was twisting her rings; her chin steeped in her bosom once more; her eyes wonderingly on him. "You have a heart too large for you. You don't know what you are saying. You follow the sentiment and lose the fact. It is beautiful, but impossible, all this. Life is what you make it, for you. I am what life makes me. You don't realize the difference between us; the insuperable difficulties for me."

"Tell me what they are."

"Ah, no!" She shook her head. "There are some things a woman cannot confess—to anybody she cares for."

"May a man guess at them?"

She protested. "Not even that—" but he overrode the objection.

"Have these insuperable difficulties to do with money? There, I have been brutal. Be as brutal in return, and tell me the truth."

She demurred, "No, no. After all——"

He persisted: "Have they?"

"I will not answer."

"You have answered. Those are no difficulties."

"You think not?"

"I am sure not."

"For you, perhaps not. But for me— Do you think I would—— No, no! You cannot imagine. I have my pride, friend Rupert, it is my substitute for reputation. I will accept nothing I cannot repay."

"But you shall accept this in trust for Bella. Bella shall repay."

"How?"

"Oh, I don't know how, and I don't know when, and I don't know where. Perhaps some day by letting me be witness of the happiness I have helped to make for her. That would be repayment enough. All we ask of a flower is that it shall bloom for us. You know Bella is my little sister, and I am Bella's big brother. It is all drawn up on paper, and signed and witnessed. I want my little sister to grow up in company with all her virtues; to lose not one of them by the way; to grow up good, and wise, and healthy, and beautiful; shielded from all harm and every sort of danger—from the corrupting goodness as well as the corrupting evil of the world. Perhaps—if I could have my way, she should not grow up at all. I would keep her just as she is, for I don't see how we can improve on her. But Nature doesn't listen to our fears, and Time won't stop for us. Help me to keep her close to what she is. Give her all your love and all your care, and the best and noblest of your wisdom. You are beautiful, your beauty will encourage hers. You are generous, cultured, gracious. You can teach her much. And you are good, too. Oh, yes, I mean it. I believe it.

No good mother can ever be a bad woman. Let us do our part for Bella, and then, for the rest, leave everything to Providence. Providence won't betray us now."

"Do you mean all this?"

"I mean every word of it."

For a space she looked at him with eyes that shone with tender gratitude and admiration, as if the beauty of the thing preached converted her doubts almost to believe. And then stern reality wrung the softening faith out of her gaze, and put her convert longings to flight.

"Ah, no! It is impossible. You are become Poetry. Because you see beauty in an idea you seek to perpetuate it; to make it permanent and real; and there are beauties of a sort that must not touch reality—that are destroyed the moment you try to capture them, like fragile butterflies. On one generous impulse you would build a whole prison of hopeless regrets. This obligation you espouse so warmly would grow heavier with each year; with each month; each week. You would find it in the end intolerable. Even the noblest impulse dies down, but the consequences stay behind. Once the divine fire is out, the soul in which it burned is filled with mere ashes. You would repent horribly, tied to your indiscretion like a man to a wife grown hateful. All of us would suffer. It would be tragic."

"Nevertheless—we will risk the tragedy. All life is tragic in some part of it. Every error man makes has its tragic opportunity. We have been very near to tragedy, perhaps, to-night—for one or other of us. Who knows!"

"To-morrow," she went on, "you are running away from us to save your character. And yet, with such a necessity as that to teach you the stern truth,

you talk wildly of noble things, as if the world had no tongue, nor you a heart to be afraid of it."

"The world has a short memory. Poets have been singing that for centuries. And I am not running away now merely to save my character—that appears to be gone already. I am going simply so that the world may have a chance to forget. The world will forget in time. Other more brilliant and audacious sinners than ourselves will take our place. In Spathorpe, after all, we have been indiscreet. Spathorpe is only a small place. Towns grow more tolerant as they grow bigger. In London, Paris, Berlin, this would never have happened. To-morrow, think only that I go to lay the foundations of Bella's future happiness. You said you would gladly exchange your liberty of the world for the recluse's cruse and crust. You hated your life, and the slavery of laughter. Well, I want to prove your sincerity, for Bella's sake. For Bella's sake you will accept all that my friendship offers."

"I have not promised," she began. "I am pledged to nothing." Even now, the wounded woman's love and pride rose up for war within her, but the Poet had no further fear.

"I rely on something nobler than your pledge," he told her.

And with but little more than that, this fateful interview drew to its close. To pave a way to their farewells and make leave-taking more easy, they put on, both, a lighter manner; shed all tone of controversy. Their conversation, so deep in the middle, thinned away like the waters of a lake to a thin-lipped transparency at its edge. The Poet's departure assumed an aspect superficially prosaic.

"When do you leave Spathorpe? In the morning?"

"I expect so. Yes. The train goes at 10 : 47."

"So early?"

"Mr. Pendlip wants to catch the luncheon train at York."

"I shall still be in my dressing-gown."

"You must have a good rest in the morning. I have kept you up a frightful long time."

"I suppose I shall not see you again before you go. You will write to tell me of your safe arrival."

"You may be sure. And later, I shall write—to touch on other things."

She made no acknowledgment of that, except by a smile that seemed to say: "Oh, my friend Rupert! You are young. You are sanguine."

At last he rose to go, drawing on unaided the coat of which Mrs. Dysart's hand had so imperiously divested him. Perhaps she thought of that as she watched him, for there was something like a smile—though not a smile—that flickered in her eyes. It turned to a little emotion when he stood before her for departure, but the emotion was quickly subdued. "You are a good boy!" she told him, with the mock seriousness that is emotion's refuge. "But you good men make life very hard for us women. I would almost like to kiss you—but I think I won't. And besides—I have not quite forgiven you. My pride is injured. It is humiliating to find out that one's good looks are inferior to a man's conscience. I am certainly not so attractive as I thought myself. And a woman hates to be made a saint against her will. But your generosity saves you. If you had not that, your goodness would make you intolerable. Good-by. Stop! After all I think I may venture to kiss you—so long as I do it piously, here, on the cheek." And then, when she had done that, on both cheeks, she added more hurriedly: "Don't think it was all sin and heartless-

ness, Rupert. It wasn't. I did care for you. With a little encouragement I could have loved you miserably. And I could have taught you to love me, too, in time, for all I'm ten years older; and we might have been most wickedly and wretchedly happy. There, I will not keep you, or repentance will repent of itself."

She did not go with him to the door. The Poet let himself out into the morning air alone, and while he walked soberly along the deserted roadway to his rooms, Mrs. Dysart very quietly, and without the least fuss, leaning over the end of the settee on which she sat, made a small lace handkerchief damp with tears.

XLVII

AND on the morrow—or to be exact, on that same morning, later—Richard Pendlip received a letter inscribed in the Poet's hand. It did not surprise the recipient; it only pleated his mouth more grimly.

"Well, well!" he muttered to himself. "The fool needn't have written. I know well enough without." He pressed his thumb morosely on the button of the electric bell. "I'll order breakfast. Let's see what he says." What the Poet said was brief and so little true to Pendlip's expectation that he had to read the two lines twice before his incredulous understanding could admit the sense of them. "Why! Bless me!" cried Pendlip. "He's coming after all. What'll Rachel say to that! I'll send her a wire. No, no, I won't. I'll let it be a surprise for her." And the white-faced waiter addressed a rubicund human visage instead of a thundercloud.

With each moment Pendlip's self-opinion grew. Surveying last night's dinner with an impartial eye, he began to find very little fault with the meal, or with his handling of a difficult mission. "If Ronsome had come himself," thought he, "I don't believe he could have done it better."

His tact, properly reviewed, struck him as excellent. Not a word too much, not a word too little; no re-criminations; no expostulations; no show of authority. As for his fears that the Poet meant to play him false, why! they were but a prudent provision against the

remote contingency of disappointment; the premiums paid for moral insurance. He had never doubted the boy in his own heart, any more than Rachel. His bosom filled and overflowed with sententious confidences, bursting to be discharged upon the Prodigal returned. "Well, well! You've done the right thing, Rupert. I knew you'd show up honorably, my boy. Put the whole thing out of your mind. You'll hear no more about it from us. Try and forget the woman. You ought to marry and settle down."

And while Richard Pendlip made gratified incursions upon his ham and eggs, and discerned a sudden glory in the sunlight, apostrophizing the day, and saying: "Bless my life! I declare it's a shame to be going back so soon. Let's have the window open a little wider. What a splendid place, to be sure. If it wasn't for the woman, I could do with a month of this."

While Richard Pendlip glowed thus with the spirit of self-satisfaction and duty nobly done, the Poet sat sideways on his breakfast chair, with his coffee and eggs untasted, and administered the last sacraments of consolation to Bella Dysart; an altered, tearful Bella who hung with both arms about his neck, and could not believe, and could not be comforted.

"Oh, Roo, Roo, Roo! You're not going! You're not going away, are you? Mamma says you are. Mr. Herring says he's packing all your things up. Mrs. Herring's making out your bill against the window downstairs, with her spectacles on. It's ever so long already. And Louisa's gone for a fresh bottle of ink and a postage stamp. Oh, no, no. You can't be going. Tell me you're not going."

"Come, come! Bella!" he told her, putting a kiss upon the beseeching forehead lifted to him. "Don't cry. It's not so bad as that—it's only me that's going."

Not you. And besides, it isn't fair to cry like that, for I don't know how to cry, and can't join you. Men can't cry a bit—any more than they can sew. They can only pull faces, Bella, or cough, or blow tunes on their noses. But if I could! O my! If only I could. Your cry wouldn't have the ghost of a chance against mine. You'd give up at once, and listen instead; for my cry would be big enough for both of us, like Sir Henry's umbrella. And, after all, what's the use of crying? It's no use, and it's no ornament. It only makes one's nose red, and one's eyes; and wets your pocket-handkerchief and my waistcoat, and gives me cold. Besides, I want to talk to you, Bella. I've got heaps of things to tell, but I really can't while you are weeping like that; for all the time I'm looking at your tears, and wondering if they're really made of sea-water as some scientists think; and calculating which will run down your cheek and reach the carpet or my waistcoat first. There! That's another. Right on my knee, like a hot three-penny bit. And all my things are packed, and I've no dry clothes to put on."

"Then you *are* going!" Bella broke out afresh. "Oh, Roo! Oh, Roo! Then you *are* going. Say you're not. Tell me you're not."

"But you wouldn't have me tell a story, Bella!" he remonstrated, looking with smiling pity on the big round tear that squeezed its slow way—in spite of the bitten lip and nipped nose of repression—onto her lashes for a silvery fall. Bella subscribed a faltering and hesitating "No—o!"—but she was at that stage of trouble when moral perspective seems all awry, and truth and falsehood less distant from each other than in happier hours, when the untempted heart has leisure to make splendid and righteous distinctions. "Why are you going? Oh, Roo! Why do you want to go?"

"I don't want to go, Bella."

"Then if you don't want to go, why are you going?"

"For the same reason, Bella, that poor pussie went into the pork pie. Because she couldn't help herself. It's all in the way of business, Bella. And you know what business is, don't you?"

Bella uttered a quavering "Yes. Mamma says business is what makes gentlemen miss the last train. Oh, Roo! Let it make you miss this one. Stop another day. Another morning. Another hour. You don't know how wretched I am. You only see the outside. Inside it's six, no ten, no, twenty times worse. It just feels like a funeral, Roo. I've never been to one, though I've seen lots out of doors. But Louisa has, and she says everybody was crying, and nobody could bear to look at anybody, and it took two of them to hold her Aunt up, and they gave her a pair of black gloves that weren't her size, and told her she could get them changed when the funeral was over, only she split the thumb. Oh, Roo! If you were me, and I were you, and I was going, and you were left behind, I couldn't go away like this, all of a sudden. Oh, I wouldn't. Indeed I wouldn't. You weren't going yesterday. Why should you be going to-day? Talk to me, Roo. Please! And try and make me understand. I'd love to understand, and know what I'm crying for. Perhaps I should cry easier then. I can't now for thinking about things."

"But I'd rather you didn't understand, Mother Hubbard," the Poet admonished her tenderly, "and didn't cry at all. I wish I didn't understand myself—and I'm not sure that I do."

"Oh, Bella!" he exclaimed. "Business is business, and understanding's a dreadful thing. So long as you can get along without understanding—never understand. All the lawyers will tell you that, and charge

you for it. Everything in the world alters when once you understand it. Everything seems to go. If only one could understand everything, there would be nothing, Bella, and that's terrible. Every time you understand something, you lose a bit of yourself; a bit of the old Bella. And soon there will be none of the old Bella left. Only an understanding, and a crying, knowledge and tears. I'm afraid I'm talking parables, Bella. You know what a parable is, don't you?"

"Yes," said Bella. "The Pilgrim's Progress and the Prodigal Son."

"Well," reflected the Poet. "The Prodigal Son is one of them. And I'm another. And I think you're a third. We're all prodigal sons—and daughters—for the most part; and parables to other people. But there's no fatted calf, Bella, for those who are prodigal children and parables to their own sorrowful selves: prodigal sons and daughters who come back to the home of their early innocence, and find it closed fast against them forever. Oh, Bella! Never stray from yourself. Keep close to your own self from day to day for fear you lose yourself and understand, and come back when it's too late!"

And Bella promised loyally through her tears, saying: "I will. I will, Roo. I'll keep just as I am. I promise. I won't change a bit. I won't understand anything. O my!"

"And we'll live on trust, won't we, Bella. You shall trust me, and I will trust you, and we'll both trust mamma, and mamma shall trust us both, and we'll all trust one another. Trusting is ever so much more beautiful than understanding. Like the old woman at the tuck shop at school, who couldn't read and couldn't write but trusted to our honor to chalk up all our jam-puffs and shandygaffs on the slate behind the counter,

and pay for them on allowance day. *She* cried, too, Bella, when I left school, and gave me a bag of cheese-cakes to eat on my way home, and told me: 'You're only a young gentleman, with all your life before you; and I'm an old woman that has to count my days very careful now, for I never know how many more I'm likely to get.' And she said she'd just like to give me a kiss for luck if I'd let her, and as there was nobody about, I stuck my face over the counter and said: 'All right. Make haste!'—and she gave me one and said: 'God bless you!'"

"But you're coming back again!" Bella interposed, displaying a new alarm. "Oh, Roo! Say you are. Say you're not going for good."

"Why, surely, you would not have me go for bad!" the Poet taxed her, laughing these fresh fears aside. "I hope it's very much for good, or be sure I shouldn't go. And after all, what is there so dreadful about it, Bella? Everybody has to go, a little sooner or a little later. Lots of people have gone already. The Polliwog's gone, though you never cried for him. And Summer's going too, and soon Spathorpe will be as silent as a Sunday. No Parade. No bands. No niggers. No nothing. And before so very long, a little girl called Bella Dysart will go like all the rest."

"And then I shall see you again?" she broke out, radiant with sudden hope. "Shall I? Oh, Roo! Shall we all see each other again?"

"Very likely, Bella."

"Only 'very likely?' Oh, say 'of course,' Roo. Tell me: 'Of course we shall.'"

"Well then, 'of course we shall,' Bella."

"Soon?"

"Yes. Soon."

"Very, very soon?"

"Very, very soon."

"Where? In London?"

"In London, Bella. Yes, I think so."

She clasped his neck as if those soft arms were turned to steel of a sudden; her mouth pressed against his cheek was screwed as hard as a signet. "Oh, Roo! Oh, Roo! I don't care how soon we go now. I don't want to stop at Spathorpe any longer. I hate it. No, I don't hate it. I couldn't hate it. I love it. But everything's different. It's almost as if I had begun to understand. I shall never go on the Parade again; or on the pier; or up to the Castle. Never. I shall never go anywhere, or do anything, or try to enjoy myself. All the time I shall be thinking about you. Shall you be thinking about me? Oh, say you will. Say you will!"

"Indeed I will, Bella. And I will write some more poetry for you."

"Like 'Alfred about to be washed,'" Bella threw in eagerly. "And 'Poor old Mrs. Cook' and 'Ungrateful Jane'?" Oh, I love those. And will you make them all up in a book one day, as you said you would, and print: 'To Bella' on the front page, where everybody can see it? You will? Oh, Roo! Oh, Roo! And you'll write me a letter as soon as ever you get home, and put heaps of love and kisses at the end. Will you? You will? Oh, Roo, Roo!"

"And you must write to me too, Bella," the Poet told her. "You know how, beautifully. Put your tongue out, and curl your legs tight, and breathe like Bendigo when he's asleep under the sofa. Never mind a bit about the spelling. I'm not going to read your letters aloud, so you needn't be frightened. Besides, ladies and gentlemen don't spell nowadays. It's fright-

fully vulgar. Spelling's only for people who were brought up at board schools, and don't know any better. And don't trouble to rule any lines in pencil to begin with. Then you won't run off them. And drop all your blots onto the table-cloth if possible; they make letters so hard to read. But if you can't hit the table-cloth, aim for the carpet, Bella—that's ever so much bigger, and you can tread the blot out with your foot. Write everything you can remember, and when you can think of nothing more to tell me, and you've eaten the end of your pen-holder to pieces, seal up the letter and put it in the post. Then you'll think of a lot. You're going to promise me, aren't you, Bella?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" Bella chanted, with the fervor that is between delight and sorrow. "I promise, Roo. I promise. Truly and faithfully. Oh, ask me to promise ever such a lot more. I love promising. Don't you?"

And so the last grains of this summer gladness trickled to an end. Giovanni Massarella, that prince of mechanical pianists, drew up all unheard beneath the Poet's balcony, and nearly broke Bella's heart with the sudden music of departed joys; like a dead name, for the first time uttered, that was once the formula for love and laughter, and is now become a sure and sacred recipe for tears. Bella ran to the balcony, all blurred with weeping as she was, and paid Massarella his salary into the area, because she could not see a bit; and it took Massarella's comrade a tune and a half to find where the sixpence lay. And higher up the Parade were heard the niggers—who would be here very shortly—pursued by their customary retinue of unprofitable wooden spades and tin buckets and butcher's boys, that had encumbered the performance three times already,

and were intent upon a fourth while the big dog licked somebody's beef in the butcher-boy's basket. They went out upon the balcony, these two—that structure of dear and sentient iron, half monument, half friend—and shared a few last sacred moments. There was not a single spot within range of Bella's mournful finger from which she did not cull some blessed virtue of sweet remembrance and association, distilled into the purest of tears. All Spathorpe in the sunlight seemed to shed a sigh; to exhale that wondrous sweetness that comes from a bruised heart; to give forth its best; to reflect Bella's sorrow with a countenance of heavenly tenderness and beauty. Never had the bay shone fairer, or smiled with a diviner light. Something of Sabbath sanctity seemed descended from above, investing the secular bosom of the place, and endowing every-day life with spiritual beauty. Soon the band would burst out upon the Parade; the turnstiles would chirrup; frocks would rustle. The Baron, sneezing in the strong sunlight, would wend his scented way to the terrace. The Powder Monkey, new-puffed and fleeced, would swing her jaunty petticoats across the bridge, carrying the familiar volume from the lending library that had made the journey so many times, unread. For these and others, life would be just the same. For the Poet it was become all suddenly a deeper, different tincture, with something of sadness; something of resignation; something of courage; something of unrest; something of tranquillity; very much of hope.

And when, at the appointed time, the Parade should turn its eyes to look for him upon the terrace, he would already be far away, thundering along the rails toward that cherished new-world in life where he had the vision that Bella Dysart's happiness should be founded. And only the girl and mother would remain; the one

humid of eye and mournful of mouth; the other bright-eyed, restless, watchful of the clock; drawing comfort from her clasped daughter under semblance of imparting it, and consolation from the lips that cried: "Suppose——"

(1)

THE END

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